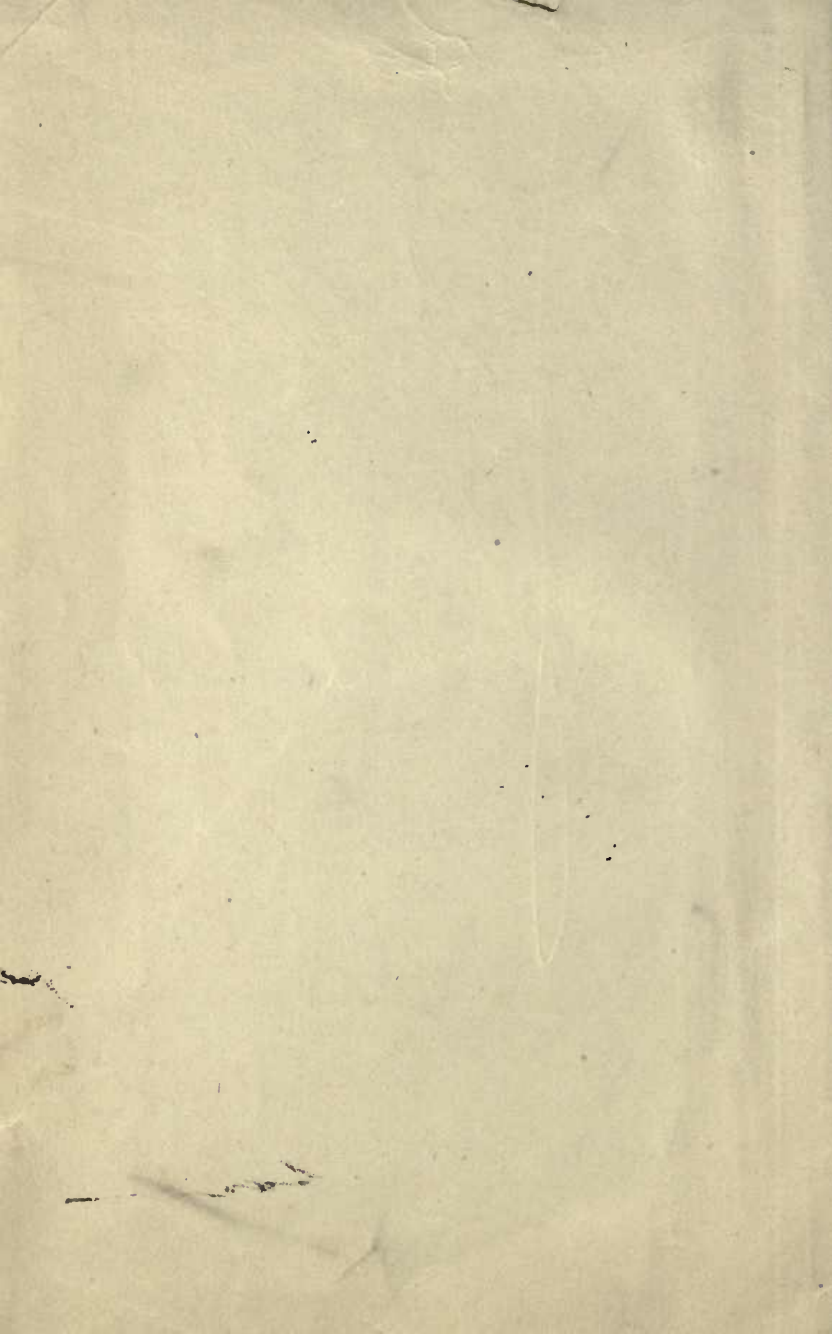


OUR
RIGHT
TO
LOVE.

ANNA CHASE DEPPEN.



Lwen Slovenco



Autograph

To —

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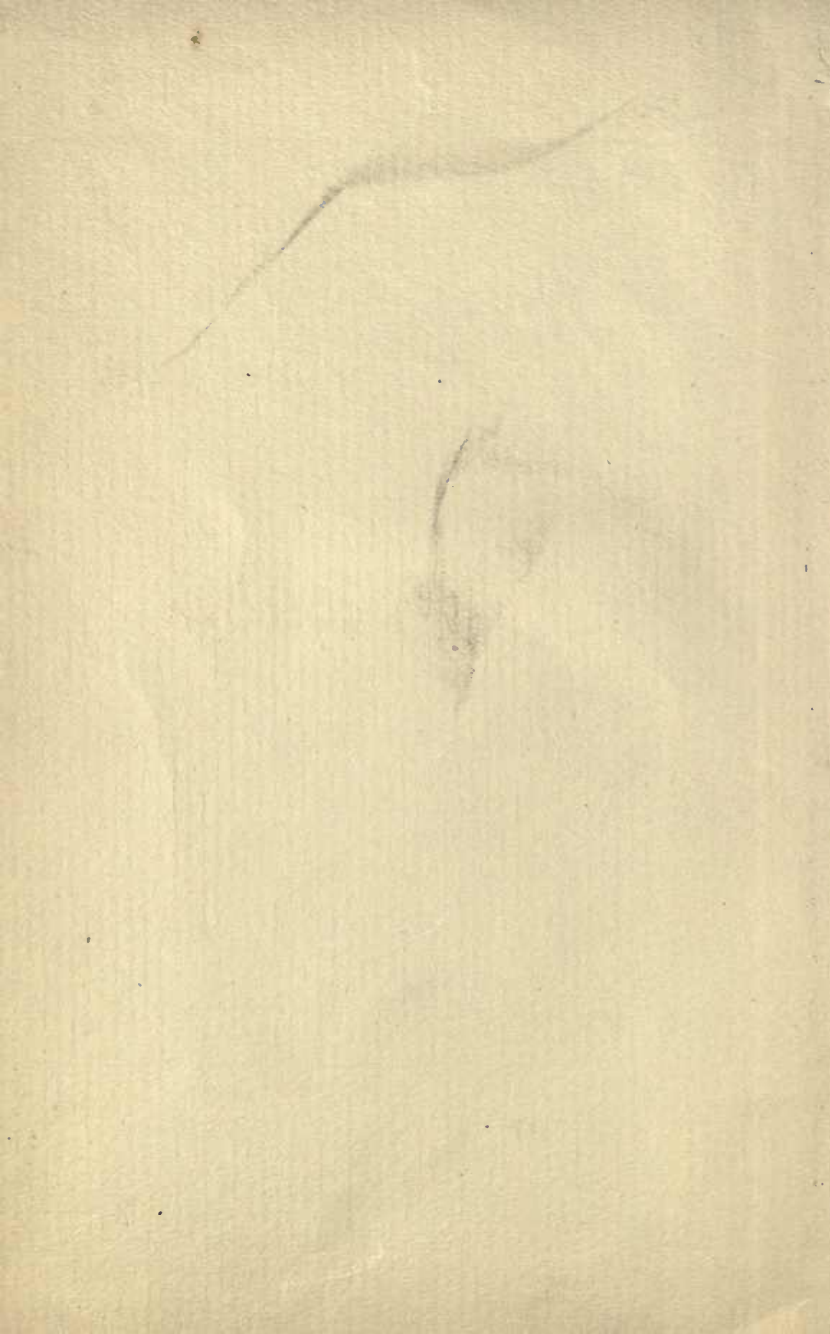
Mr. W. W. Houston.

Your friend
always —

Anna Chase Leppan

December —

1905



OUR RIGHT TO LOVE



SOFTLY—VERY SOFTLY THE BOW TOUCHED THE STRINGS—
CURVED—BENT.

OUR RIGHT TO LOVE.

BY

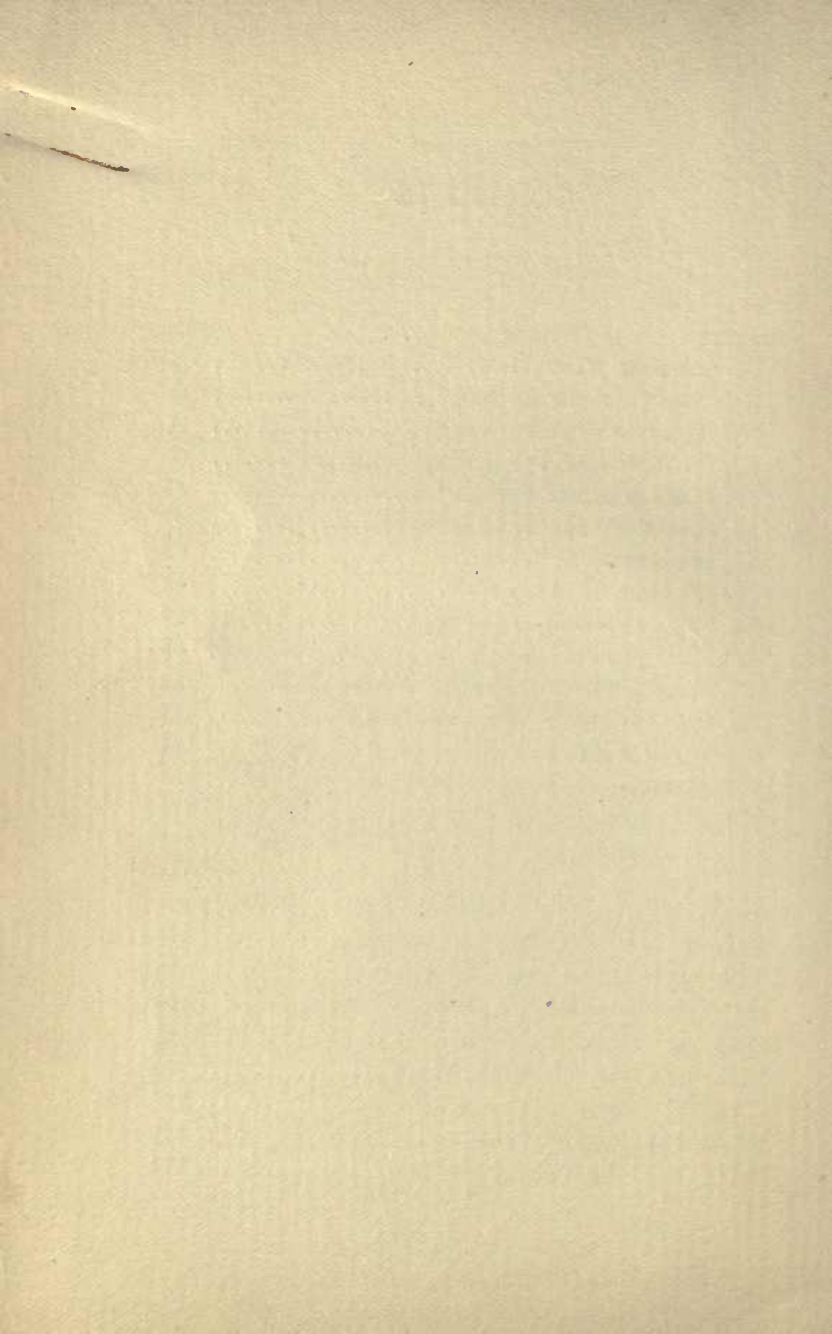
ANNA CHASE DEPPEN.

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Our Right to Love

CHAPTER I.

LECHAW HANNA.

A JEWEL dropped from the fingers of the Infinite in the dream-hour of Creation—the classic Vale of Wyoming reposes in its rock-ribbed cradle beneath the vast dome of mystery.

To the redman Maughwauwame meant simply, big plains; the long strip hardly quickening his imagination, beyond Peace as the abode, and Delight as the hunting ground. And the earlier settler experienced less concern for its vast prodigality, until, one hundred years ago, hacking the bronze-green enamel surface—through sheer love of vandalism, or mayhap, with questioning earnestness—incalculable wealth crowned his endeavor.

The formidable coal breakers towering many feet above green sward, dark culm hills scintillating in the sunlight, flames seen at intervals when mines are in operation, suggest practical energy—the wanton pickax now a force and developing a treasure over which man contends and the world's interest is unusually stirred.

Where the Susquehanna and Lackawanna rivers meet is a little island called by the Shawnees Lechaw Hanna

—by the colonizer Lackawannock or Lackawanna—which signifies the meeting of two streams. Facing the island is Campbell's Ledge—a huge petrified animal crouching with inscrutable face slightly inclined forming a natural sun-dial, from which fact, this mountain acquired the unusual sobriquet—Dial Rock.

Campbell's Ledge had a peculiar fascination for the Shawnees. Grouped at its base wigwams were often seen in pioneer days and braves of the Six Nations smoked the calumet here, planning atrocities too horrible to describe. And the island, smiling peacefully in its wealth of green, hardly awakens the flagitious thought, yet under one of its great trees repose the bones of an Indian queen, and many the arrow-head and tomahawk the soil has given forth as proof and testimony.

The Kentucky girl had not heard the history of the island until Jack Ruford seized upon it as a leader to deeper romance. Jack Ruford came of pioneer stock. His great-grandfather had shared the rude hut of an irascible squatter and, on another occasion, from the same abode, stolen a bride. Valley people, with the inquisitiveness born of the hills, ferreted out the story, sending it down to posterity with the usual embellishments. Thus, the simple, original romance of a willing young woman led gently away from her own door by a brave man, during the absence of cruel and unreasonable parents, entirely escaped Ruford's generation.

It was a feather in Ruford's cap that his remote ancestor figured in a chivalrous legend—dear to the early settler at a time when chivalry seemed at an ebb, owing, possibly, to the unseemly conduct of neighborly scalp-lifters. Presumably because on one occasion the young man nearly experienced hairbreadth escape from heroism, the Valley people kindly recalled the legend

to which by inherent right he was entitled to Lochinvar dauntlessness.

"So your great-grandfather was a gay Lothario?"

"That is not the story." Jack Ruford was piqued.

"Oh; how may you vouch for the contrary?" Jack made an effort at explanation:

"There is a man up the Valley who is nearly ninety, and his grandfather——"

"Saw the first crow," cut in Maithale Burton, and, waving her hand deprecatingly, she cried softly: "Pass the ancient."

But Jack Ruford refused to proceed until he had adjusted the character of his early ancestor.

Maithale sighed when the recital came to an end, and inquired:

"I don't suppose you would care to play the young man from 'out of the west?'"

"Oh, if the occasion——"

"You mean the girl——"

Something in Ruford's face suddenly checked the humorous raillery, and her voice dropped to a lower key.

"Tell me," she pleaded, "about Frances Slocum, who was stolen."

Her voice coaxed, and Ruford regarded her silently, while she, opening a penknife, began to hack at a lead pencil.

He relieved her embarrassment by the immediate possession of both. Having sharpened the pencil, he handed it over, replacing the borrowed article where it belonged, and began to whistle softly while she scribbled hurriedly in an elegant Russian leather notebook, which offence excluded her from the great society of the scratch-pad.

His tune halted presently, and he inquired abruptly, glancing down at the book:

"Is it fair to cribbage a fellow's conversation?"

"Sure."

"And that is what is called original—creative?"

"It depends on the conversation. It is generally called," she explained learnedly, "utilizing space."

"You are studying journalism?"

"Can't a girl employ her time profitably without seriously rendering account?"

He was silent—meditating upon the ways of a girl—when she jogged his memory by repeating the introductory:

"Tell me about Frances Slocum, who was stolen."

"Oh, I see; you contemplate ancient history, massacre and things?"

She nodded and he got upon his feet, brandishing a stick in the air, dancing Indian fashion, and giving the war-whoop at every new caper.

"Bravo! Bravo! Please don't stop; I shall have to describe that."

"See here," seating himself again. But she interrupted:

"You were fine; you looked like one of those savage creatures, really."

"I suppose I always do?"

"When you try—yes. Do go on, Jack; I remember the first part—this Frances Slocum was stolen by the Indians when five years old."

He nodded:

"That's the story."

"Was she pretty?"

"Well, Frances might have been a pretty baby, but she was awfully ugly when discovered at fifty-nine. That

was in 1837. Grandfather told me he saw her. She came into the village on a beautiful animal."

"Panther or cow?"

Ruford disregarded the levity, quietly continuing:

"She was accompanied by her two daughters, tastefully gowned, Indian fashion, of course. Her Indian name was Macon-a-quah—young bear. One daughter was named Kich-Kenchequah—cut finger; the youngest daughter—Kippenoquah—corn tassel."

"Lovely!" cried Maithale enthusiastically. "And did she remember her own people?"

"Only when the brother asked if her middle finger was crushed. She at once recalled her father's shop and the accident that severed the member."

"I should have hated the whole tribe when I realized that I had been kidnapped."

"Well, you see, Maithale, they had been good to her, and all her own people except her brother were dead."

"I should hate anybody who even thought of kidnapping me."

"Don't worry," he said, emphatically.

"A man did try to steal me once," she ventured.

"Every baby gets that chance."

"I was not a baby six years ago."

"Tell me about it," he coaxed.

"And you will do the savage again?"

They were sitting on the long bench in Hammock Court, whiling away pleasantly the hour before the arrival of the invited guests.

He got up, walked over to the brush that walled the Susquehanna from view at this point, and hurled the stick that a moment before had figured in the dance

into the thicket. Returning to her side he remarked, thoughtfully:

"I wouldn't care to steal a girl merely to gain her hate."

"You are contemplating——?"

But Jack Ruford's opportunity passed. The next moment she was running over to the wall of brush, listening intently.

"A-he-ee-ho! A-he-ee-e-ho!"

It was the call for the ferry.

And some one running down the bank answered:

"A-he-ho! A-he-ho!"

Maithele Burton peeped forward through an opening where the brush had been thinned—possibly for the accommodation of the over-inquiring. She gazed steadily one moment—two; then a long, deep sigh escaped her lips, and she turned again to Ruford:

"You may flirt with me to-night, Jack. I—I—want to test a man's devotion." Having delivered herself, she was off like a deer; and before Jack Ruford recovered from the blow she appeared again at an upper window of the house facing the court. Here she deliberately parted the lace curtains and called softly, making a trumpet of her hands:

"Jack!"

Ruford looked up gloomily.

"Don't make love to me to-night; I've changed my mind."

"The devil!"

But the pious annotation fell short of the window.

Dorothy Dale, the fair young mistress of Lechaw-Hanna, and the devoted friend of Maithele Burton—the Kentucky girl—ward of Mr. Francis Dale, Dorothy's father, was adding a touch of blue to her gown,

her ear having caught the merry tinkle of the ferry; and she hurried the last touch to her toilet with anxiety, anxious to meet the guests who were landing at the river's edge. And the Kentucky girl glanced a second time from the window of Dorothy Dale's room, presently remarking:

"Who is our new guest? See, Dorothy; she is leaning on Richard Allan's arm coming up the walk. She seems to be ill."

Dorothy moved over to the window, nodding approvingly:

"I forgot to tell you;" and Dorothy, resting her hand on Maithale's shoulder, resumed: "The girl is an old schoolmate, Clara Lansing. We were not in the same class—but the same school. I hope you will like her. She was abroad last summer. The winter previous she called once or twice; you were away from home on both occasions. You remember the cards that came for a luncheon the day we were leaving for the island? I expressed our regrets and naturally extended the usual courtesy. While you and Jack Ruford were boating yesterday a telegram came—rather an abrupt way to announce a visit—but, for the slight irregularity charge the etiquette to Dorothy Dale. I wrote her to come any old time, and verily, verily——"

Dorothy hastened below, returning almost immediately with Clara Lansing, whom she turned over to Aunt Helen. Aunt Helen's sympathy went out to the young woman, whom she conveyed at once to the cheery room in waiting, and leaving the young lady with much solicitude in charge of the faithful maid, she hurried below.

"That's right, Amanda." Aunt Helen spoke to

Amanda Brown, a quaint little person in widow's weeds. "Make yourself at home; that horrid accommodation train wore you out. Mr. Lawrence—delighted! And Mr. Allan! So happy to see you."

Aunt Helen had given the best years of her life to mother Dorothy, if thirty might be the age of exquisite enjoyment. When entering the delightful period she had refused a splendid establishment and an honored name, that a wee babe might not suffer from the untimely taking away of a young mother. Yet she was in all probability prepared for the sacrifice, owing to an early grief.

There was a whispered tradition in Dorothy's set that in the winter of '70 Aunt Helen, as she was familiarly known, had led the cotillion with young Van Ransom; that the merciless scythe had cut down the scion of that noble house a week before the nuptial day. Be it as it may, "from out the fullness of the heart the lips speaketh" in no instance seemed commonplace from Aunt Helen, whose reminiscence ever touched the golden spot over which fate had thrown the violet pall.

"Make yourselves perfectly at home," Aunt Helen proceeded.

Richard Allan dropped into a chair at Dorothy's side.

"And do," she continued, "just as you are accustomed when at home."

"Mercy!" ejaculated Ned Lawrence, who was Dorothy's devotee. "I would be shouting to Cousin Susan, who is deaf."

Aunt Helen arched her brows slightly. It behooves the certain chaperon to maintain the certain dignity:

"When I was a girl, and Mr. Van Ransom——"

"Yes, Auntie," interrupted Dorothy; "but things were different then."

"They are different now," said Allan; "pardon my clownish behavior."

Everybody jumped up, and Dorothy laughed. Youth laughs so easily; a mere bagetelle sets the merriness; but Aunt Helen found no cause for extravagant mirth. Her inquiring glance fell sharply upon her niece. Later, as the curfew chimed the evening hour, Clara Lansing, thoroughly recuperated, came down the fanciful stairway, trailing a crimson gown. She was joined by Maithale Burton, who introduced herself without ceremony, and the two at once began the promenade of the long veranda, making conversation out of the picturesque surroundings, until Dorothy Dale's voice from the music-room reached them.

Dorothy felt slightly piqued with Maithale who had secluded herself all noon, leaving the entertaining of three gentleman, Richard Allan, Ned Lawrence and Jack Ruford, entirely to herself.

The promenaders paid little heed to the voice, and presently Dorothy called again:

"Maithale, Mr. Allan wants to greet you."

Maithale paused.

"I like that," in an undertone to Clara Lansing—then, quite audibly:

"If the mountain will not come to Mohammed——"

"The mountain," laughed Dorothy from within, "remains immovable."

But Allan came forth at once, extending his hand graciously, addressing Maithale Burton:

"May a cyclone rend the mountain in twain that refuses to go forth at your bidding."

"Quick, a boutonniere, somebody!" cried the young lady addressed; "and, people, bear witness——" her

voice growing dramatic through mere jest and merriment—

“By yon bright star——”

The man gazed upward. Twilight was passing.

“Or moon,” she corrected.

A pale disk hung in the sky.

“I am Mohammed. Mr. Allan declares it.”

“Yourself, rather,” said Clara Lansing icily; and Maithela, turning her eyes upon the speaker, felt the chill of coming events.

CHAPTER II.

THE MIDNIGHT REVERIE.

A DAY is eventful that brings with it a great joy ; and of all joys, the sudden and unexpected appearance of one beloved is not the least. With the excitement and the meeting the spirit exalts ; then a finger seems pressed upon the pulse ; and calm follows only in the precious solitary moments before the eyes decide upon forgetfulness.

The first evening of the house party over, Maithale retired to the seclusion of her room.

The pretty frills of the white robe nicely adjusted, and the long wavy hair brushed and braided, she extinguished the light and, walking over to the window, inhaled the soft June air. Beyond the green sward her eyes rested upon Campbell's Ledge, towering up from the Susquehanna, a dark mass outlined in silvery strips of moonlight.

Her thoughts swift as wings sped from the Valley, traveling those countless miles that separate the past and present.

She was a bud unfolding when Richard Allan came into her life, and his advent and passing stirred as the new breath of summer the unfolding of the rose. Under the lightest pressure the mind inevitably turns with centripetal force to the florulent days. With hope of consolation? Perhaps! And the mind will sometimes revel in tender recollections until evolution, brought

about by sudden action or alarm, swings the pendulum back again into the present. Memories are the real helps of life. When the heart is in no pressing need of consolation they are a gentle stimulus; and when the overburdening is too great, when the bitter outweighs the sweet, they are the auxiliaries that stir the heart to strength and action. Gazing into the soft June night, Maithel's reverie passes beyond the Ledge.

It is June, a warmer June than the Valley feels, and the dark-winged birds have gone to their own country, and with them—'twas ever so—companions of a lighter wing; but the bee, the little brown bee remains, for the warmer the sun, the sweeter the honey. Flowers, trees, ribbon grasses—a beautiful, rolling country! And beyond the park the fine old colonial mansion where lived and died so many of her race. 'The house is white, the shutters green, and night is over all.

Protruding from the center wall of the lower gallery of the mansion a great chandelier juts forth ablaze. The master of the mansion appears in the doorway, speaks to the black sentry pacing to and fro, gives an order and, going hastily down the board walk, enters the carriage in waiting.

As the deft turning of the kaleidoscope, the colors shift. The event, every detail of which she holds dear, is over. Her first appearance before the footlights is passed, and the Prince appeared.

The Prince! And with the first deep cry of the Rubinstein melody she has given him her heart. But even the smile of a sweet reverie has its weight; dark follows brightness; the old mansion is drenched in mist, and long crepe streamers hang at the entrance door. A slight shiver shakes her frame; she passes her hand lightly across her eyes and awakens from reverie.

The past falls back upon itself; it is the present that fills her mind with startling force. Raising her hand to lower the sash, she catches a glint of fire.

Some one smoking in Hammock Court!

Hurriedly withdrawing from the window, she clasps her hands nervously, thoroughly aroused.

"I have been standing there dreaming of home, forgetful of all beside, and the moonlight full upon me; and a man—coolly looking on!"

She slipped into the passage and discovered a window where the moonbeams could not reach.

"I certainly think," searchingly, and disregarding her own position, "men visitors do the most unseemly things—prowling around when they should be in bed."

As she gazed the man threw the unfinished cigar to the ground, put his foot upon it, and, leaving the Court, walked leisurely over to Bachelor Quarters. At the door he paused, sending a long glance to a certain window that a moment before held a vision in white; then, lifting the latch of the weather-beaten door, he disappeared within.

"Richard!" she cried, with sudden recognition. But the voice died in the silence, and, well for her, reached not the man. The spell was broken; something stirred in the adjoining room, and, like a frightened mouse, noiselessly she stole back to her own door, flew to her couch, and was soon peacefully sleeping.

Soft lights and a cigar often bring solace more helpful than the sparkling cup of utter forgetfulness. Allan indulged in dreams, but they were seldom silver-bordered, as were Maithale Burton's; on the contrary, ominous clouds floated in the background with uncertain perspective. In the present hour he had come to a bridge. Cool, deliberate and calculating in affairs of the head,

with no weakness whatsoever or oversusceptibility, he had nevertheless managed to get both head and heart into a strange entanglement.

Allan was one of those for whom the world's appellation is "self-made." Yet, having acquired his early training in a village school, he managed by dint of hard work and tireless energy to pass through college and reach the bar. And swinging forth a shingle—there was little to back it, save the good name of honest Mohawk stock that seldom fails to produce the gentleman, and often enough, as history exemplifies, the American brains.

The dark days that followed the admission to practice at the bar pursued Allan as many another, and resources came to an end, just as luck, in the person of John R. Lansing, stepped upon the scene.

Mr. Lansing understood. The suit was won, and joy filled the young man's heart.

John R. Lansing was a keen, shrewd, practical, non-sentimental man of the world. His great deeds of philanthropy had certain attachments, and his kind actions generally netted fair returns.

Allan never could explain how the intimacy began between Clara Lansing and himself, nor could he penetrate the solicitousness of John R. Lansing.

The length and breadth of gratitude, though a territory, has limit; but, to Richard Allan, it was land without border.

The deep, self-sacrificing spirit which lay at the root of most of his troubles brought him finally to the bridge, the crossing of which would determine his future.

John R. Lansing's niece enjoyed fair sailing as a debutant in the social world; but the fifth season opened the uncle's eyes to the fact that a suitor must be found

and, for certain qualities, Mr. Richard Allan was selected.

Allan found dainty pink notes often enough on his desk, and the runs to the metropolis proved pleasant and enjoyable.

The first winter after his acquaintance with the Lansings he went south. A man generally does something foolish when, for the first time in life, he throws care and restraint aside and gives himself a holiday; but Allan did nothing foolish, beyond getting to the end of his resources, which necessitated an early return to his desk. The southward journey proved sweet. In one city, where the flowers seemed lovelier because love was there, and the world more beautiful because joy was in his own heart, one face stirred his soul—a bud of an aristocratic tree that promised unusual development.

Allan returned to his home again, and the routine, which now and then included the Lansings, continued uninterrupted for two years, at the expiration of which term he found himself engaged to Clara Lansing.

In the fifth year of his business career Allan became one of the attorneys of a great railroad. His future was assured, and Maithale Burton again loomed into his dream.

Although Maithale was the last to retire, save one, she was the first on the ground the following morning, save one.

Possibly the man and the cigar occupied her thoughts. She walked directly over to Hammock Court, seating herself on the narrow bench under the linden tree. Her eyes finding the half finished cigar, her foot made an attempt at annihilation as the owner of the castaway emerged from the east door of Bachelor Quarters.

"Happy stub!" said Allan, fervently regarding his action.

"I'm glad it's you!" she murmured as he seated himself. No response; she went on: "I don't suppose you suffered with nightmare last night?"

"My eyes closed with a vision in white," he responded. "I dreamed of the vision, but awakened to a sad reality."

"I—I didn't know there was a soul about."

Absorbed in the real vision, he did not hear her remark.

"It's the way of the world," he continued, in a sort of soliloquy—regarding the unattainable.

"What is the way of the world?" she inquired defiantly. "Men prowling around when they should be in bed?"

It was his turn—consternation visible as he turned his eyes to the top branches of the linden.

"What are you talking about?"

But ere the inquiry left his lips light dawned upon him. He looked down, twirling the locket that hung on his watch-chain; a miracle might divulge his thought.

He had taken a girl's face out of the locket the night before. Not that he dreaded Maithale Burton seeing it—there would have been no occasion. But because it had no place there, save as a compliment, and the compliment seemed out of order. "Besides," as he said to himself the night previous, justifying his conduct, "it was a mistake from first to last; it would be an injustice to Clara Lansing to keep her picture as something sacred." He would find an excuse that very day to present the empty case. She would understand—she must understand.

He had crossed the bridge, and he would stand firmly upon it.

The dew was on the grass, and it seemed to Allan that Maithale's eyes held a gleam of its soft reflection. And a soft yellow light coming through an opening in the deep foliage of a tree that towered above them, fell upon her like a gold halo.

Not three minutes had elapsed between her thoughtless speech and his question; but to Maithale it seemed eternity.

Was he waiting for her to speak? Cruel! Had she not already committed herself. Besides, every sensible thought seemed to have flown from her brain.

"Won't you be seated? I want to tell you something."

Mechanically she sat down.

And a new chapter opened in Allan's life; but with the very first sentence fate interposed.

Ruford approached.

"Ah, Jack!" she cried, joyfully; "I knew you would not forget."

Allan's brow darkened, acknowledging the other's "good-morning," and gloomily he watched the two set off toward the river. He lighted a cigar, pulled at it once or twice, threw it away; it had not the flavor of the one he had smoked in the soft light.

Presently his attention was drawn to Dorothy Dale and Clara Lansing coming from the house, one carrying a rake, the other a hoe. Something—possibly their bonnets—lent an air of rusticity, charmingly picturesque. The two went over to the garden, falling at once to work.

The man in Hammock Court silently contemplated the light diversion, smiling cynically.

Wealthy young women attempting ordinary avocations

always amused him. He turned to the river, searching for a skiff; but it had already turned the bend, so he joined the fair gardeners.

"Taste and skill," he accredited Dorothy, after the usual greeting.

Dorothy courtesied, country fashion.

"You didn't do the original," he said. "I fancy there was quite a hill there."

"Of course Pat did the leveling; but we—that is, Maithale and myself—planted the flowers; planting and raking, you know, is the real gardening."

"You are practical, too," eying a delectable vegetable that grew in spiral profusion at the end of the little flower bed.

Dorothy flushed. "Maithale declares she knew all along they were bean-vines; she let them grow as a joke on myself. I thought they were morning-glory vines."

"Miss Burton's jokes grow," laughed Clara Lansing, waving her hand toward the slender poles exuberantly covered.

"Not bad," said the man.

Clara Lansing plucked a rose, and while arranging it on the lapel of his coat she said softly:

"You have not admired my bonnet."

"Oh, pardon. Was I to admire it? Well, really, it is not half bad." His eyes were upon the river, his thoughts beyond the bend.

The rose fell to the ground, her foot upon it.

The little scene went unnoticed by Dorothy, owing to the pink walls of her sun-bonnet.

"Talking about the absent," spoke Dorothy, "did you ever hear about Maithale's poultry yard? Oh, it's too

funny!" And she related at once the rise and fall of what Pat termed "poulet ambition."

"Miss Burton loves chickens so much?" queried the man.

"Loves?" Dorothy's face was a study. "Maithèle loves to see them grow, watch them feed, hear them cackle; she will expatiate on the beauty of the feathered shanks of a bantam hen, or the noble growth of a Shanghai rooster, and, in the next breath, order the head of one or the other chopped off."

"Tyrant!"

"She will eat," continued Dorothy, nodding her indorsement to Allan, "that same little chicken with a relish. I have seen her do it."

"Cannibal!"

Yet he laughed softly.

"Maithèle is not around to defend herself," said Aunt Helen, joining the group, Mrs. Brown and Ned Lawrence bringing up the rear. "Chickens were made to eat, and we are not vegetarians up here. The poultry experiment was a failure, but the child was not to blame; chit-minks and rats devoured the young brood."

"Spare us, Aunt—ravenous appetites and, in all probability, chicken for breakfast!"

"We are waiting," apologized Aunt Helen, "for Maithèle and Mr. Ruford."

And as she spoke the familiar signal of approach caught their attention.

"A-he-ee-ho! A-he-ee-ho!"

Dorothy answered:

"A-he-ho! A-he-ho!"

And presently silvery notes floated up from the river—the snatch of a song; a long silence and then the dip-dip of an oar.

Aunt Helen's face illumined.

"It is worth the journey from the city," which predication dignified the great metropolis, "to hear that voice."

"Around the world," said Allan, softly.

"You have heard Miss Burton sing?" inquired Clara Lansing, arching her brows. "I did not know that you knew her."

"I have known her since——" He sighed.

"Since?" persisted the lady.

"Since I came to the use of reason."

An evil foreboding touched Clara Lansing, an anger arose in her heart against the man, against the girl. Her face was flushed, which brought the cendré hair into ugly contrast, and Maithéle's smiling countenance heightened the coloring, as, approaching the group, she made the usual civilities.

"Oh, thank you," with metallic emphasis returned Clara Lansing; "we thought you two had gone to the parsonage across the stream."

"We did think about it," Maithéle rejoined nicely; "but Mr. Ruford unromantically suggested breakfast."

And at breakfast Allan found himself at Dorothy's right. And presently he was smiling and saying bright things with a new joy, for Mr. Dale was devoting himself to Clara Lansing, who seemed pleased.

Hope's gathered chips were kindling, and Allan told his bear story, which produced laughter. But to Dorothy it seemed, apart from the small joke, hardly worth rehearsing—an exoneration from cannibalism charged to Maithéle.

Possibly Clara Lansing thought likewise. Allan observed the sarcastic droop of her lower lip as he glanced her way.

CHAPTER III.

THE CRY OF THE VIOLIN.

ON the lawn stretching before the camp the guests sauntered after breakfast—save Jack Ruford, who was visiting an invalid aunt in West Pittston, and Mr. Dale, who had Clara Lansing engaged for a row on the river. Allan watched the two a moment thoughtfully; then his eyes fastened upon the grandeur and picturesqueness of the scene.

A magnificent wreath of trees, tall, majestic, wall in the island from the river view to the right of the farm, so fair and sweet in its fine state of cultivation. Beyond the wall of trees, across the river, to the rear of the camp, a formidable culm hill lifts into the scene, its frowning presence adding to the deep, shadowy background. Where the trees lop off, and the lawn facing the camp ends, the river meets the eye—a trailing, silvery life, lazily flopping green things that flirt at its edge.

As Allan's sight fell upon strings of idle cars at the base of Campell's Ledge, the screech of a big, black, serpent thing shot through the hills. Still life awakened with the wonderful breath of energy, and rural wildness seemed lovelier because of the strength and testimony.

Not many rods from the Ledge a castle, looking as though it might have come all the way down from the

Rhine country on rollers, touches the wild scene with a merry twinkle at exalted ideas, its sturdy German owner having converted the picturesque pile into a brewery.

Dorothy and Allan played tetherball, and presently a flag of truce flaunted from the topmost tower of the castle, and Lawrence, sitting on a bench with Maithale watching the players, waved in recognition. With a delightful cry Dorothy tossed her racket into space. She had won. In truth, Allan played poorly, his mind centered on the castle tower, wondering how long Mr. Dale would be able to keep Clara Lansing there.

"Shall we go for a drive?" inquired Maithale, as if divining his thought. Allan nodded gratefully. And the girls walked over to the house, the men looking after them—Lawrence dramatically touching his heart.

"Something begins to beat too rapidly," he said.

"Which one?" inquired Allan.

"There is but one," was the quietly delivered answer.

"Heart of gold," sighed Allan, and then it was Ned's turn.

"Which one?"

"There is but one." And Allan's eyes closed to hide Love's mist.

"Have a cigar?"

"Thank you, Ned. Not even the fumes of the dulcet Havana to destroy the memory of this morning, which, like new-born hope, begins to mount——"

"Have a care," interposed Lawrence, and, reflectively: "Miss Lansing might get huffy. Now, I'm fancy-free, and I'm going in to win."

Allan looked anxiously toward the castle, consulting his watch.

"Miss Lansing or anybody else, if, as I have cause to believe, the other is engaged."

"To whom?" inquired Lawrence, with color mounting.

"Find out," was Allan's sententious reply.

Lawrence got upon his feet thoroughly irritated, believing that Allan referred to Dorothy. But Allan had other meaning; his imagination, however, had flown beyond the mark. He meant Maithele, but that young lady was not engaged to Ruford.

It was quite in the afternoon when the grays returned, and Clara Lansing, sitting on the veranda, looked stolid and bored. Mr. Dale was beside her; and it was Mr. Dale—not Clara Lansing—who told the story of the morning, which Maithele mercifully cut short.

"It is growing late, dad, and"—putting her hand gently upon Clara Lansing's shoulder—"this young lady must have her 'forty winks.'"

And the mirror caught a lovely reflection two hours later as Maithele stood before it adjusting a ribbon bow.

"Aren't you wearing white?" she inquired of Dorothy.

"You wouldn't care to have a rival?" answered the other.

The reflection deepened and the eyes drooped their long, black fringes.

Yet it was Ruford that fell to Maithele, rather putting Allan out of sorts, having Clara Lansing for cribbage; and cribbage is the game of boredom, unless one is especially fond of it. Allan's inattention was so marked that his partner called to Dorothy, with irritating voice:

"Aren't we to have music?"

"Sure; Maithele will play the violin."

"Violin?" Clara Lansing arched her brows. "Then give us a Kentucky breakdown, or a coon melody," and,

turning to Allan: "If there is one thing that I cannot abide, it is a woman fiddling."

"Miss Burton will be the revelation," was the silencing rejoinder; and Maithale passing, Allan broke off to thank her.

"Oh, I am always glad to play. The trouble is"—Maithale directed her words to Clara Lansing—"I am so fond of my violin that I cannot or do not always discover the moment my audience is bored. What was it? Yes, I remember—a Kentucky breakdown! I cannot recall a breakdown; is there one? But a coon lullaby—I do know the cunningest little thing. The chorus goes like this." She sang the words as she stood before them with a graceful, rocking motion, in which her head took part:

"My little dusky babe,
You'd better go to sleep,
Befo' the goblins come
And on you creep.
Hush-a-by, ebon chile,
Your mammy's heart do stir
When you begins to smile,
You little chestnut burr!"

"That is cute; sing the rest of it," said Allan.

"No, I will play it."

Aunt Helen, Mrs. Brown, and Mr. Dale came into the room. Clara Lansing moved over to a seat beside Mrs. Brown—not for sociability, but that she might the better obtain a view of Allan's face whilst marking the violinist. And Allan, giving himself wholly to the happiness the hour afforded, leaned back in the chair directly facing the piano.

Maithele played the coon lullaby without accompaniment; selections followed. At last she rested, but the audience was merciless, clamorous. Only Clara Lansing, with eyes riveted upon the man entranced, exhibited favor.

"You certainly must be tired," she said. "You did very well, really."

"Thank you, Miss Lansing. I am not tired, but I am afraid Dorothy is; no one ever considers——"

"Now, now; please let me enjoy my rôle," and Dorothy wheeled about on the piano stool. "Who ever heard of praising the accompanist?"

"Daughter," spoke up Mr. Dale, "that is not fair. Only a moment ago——"

"Yes, dad; you are always delightful, but Mr. Lawrence——"

Lawrence was upon his feet.

"I was keeping my bouquet for the last. Ladies, gentlemen——" bowing to the audience.

"If he is going to make a speech, I certainly will retire."

"I certainly would," put in Clara Lansing. But Mrs. Brown insisted:

"If the favor is too great, will the delightful accompanist and the charming violinist give us Rubinstein's Melody in F?"

"Bravo, Mrs. Brown! No way out of that. Fish up Rubinstein," called Allan. And Lawrence at once found the music and arranged it on the piano rack.

The first time Allan heard the melody he had been seated conspicuously in the proscenium box of a Kentucky theater, the occasion being a pupil's recital. His host's daughter, Maithele Burton, whom he had not met, was down on the programme

for one selection. The girl's brother sat beside the father in the box, and at his feet lay a wonderful bouquet of roses. Allan had the minutest detail of the occasion that had so indelibly impressed itself.

He recalled that he merely caught the glimpse of a shining head, because of a quartette that performed directly in front. Such a bevy of lovely girls he had never seen before. It struck him that all the beauty of Kentucky was gathered to exhibit skill with stringed instruments.

Number five was the occasion for a decided final nudge from Brother Tom, and Allan saw advancing gracefully to the footlights a slim girl with soulful eyes wide apart, expressing musical genius, artistic temperament.

The white frock with the hem just above the ankles, exquisitely turned, was simplicity itself; big black bows adorned the high-heeled slippers, and a large black ribbon fashioned the shining hair at the back of the head.

As the selection came to an end applause broke forth, which did not cease until she came forward again. And then, like a far cry borne from strains that angels sing, the melody broke upon his slumbering soul, awakening it to everlasting memory. And now he beheld the same bonny girl, taller, fairer; the white gown not above the ankles, but sweeping the floor, a mass of frou-frou ruffles, and she, smiling into his eyes as on that memorable night.

Softly, very softly, the bow touched the strings—curved, bent.

She played with true artistic feeling, like one inspired; and Allan could almost have sworn that the passionate swell of the notes was mezzo-contralto whisper-



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ings of her own voice. He marked the sympathy of words unsung as on that memorable night, and the quality that had stirred that great audience grown deeper and richer.

Her eyes, shining mystery, reached him again, lingered, held him, and something caught in his throat, answering with a dumb sob.

The melody ceased.

The following morning Lawrence and Allan returned to their respective cities, Clara Lansing remaining over several days—days of quiet discernment for one young woman, days of decided ennui for the other. Dorothy flitted about with the usual activity of the charming hostess, putting forth her best efforts to conciliate the two. When, at last, Clara Lansing departed, Maithéle acknowledged frankly:

“I never was so eager to speed the parting guest.”

“You dislike her so much?” spoke Dorothy.

“On the contrary, I am annoyed by her aversion for myself.”

“She shall not be invited again if she finds my little sister uninteresting.” Maithéle waved a kiss.

“I would be unbearable if I could not rise to greatness on small occasions. Smiling upon Dorothy her genius spoke: “I do not dislike Miss Lansing, I do not dislike Miss Jack Tiger because she purrs—purring is part of cat nature. But I do despise Miss Jack when stretched on the hearth-rug. She dozes with one eye on myself and the other on the milk—as if I, not she, contemplated theft.”

Aunt Helen loved Dorothy devotedly, but her fondness for Maithéle was marked to a degree. And, indeed, Maithéle was the sunbeam in the house. She

laughed when the days were gloomy and delighted with the violin on all occasions.

Maithale and Dorothy had been friends since early childhood, and it was natural that Mr. Dale should assume the guardianship of his dearest friend's only surviving child. Yet Maithale suffered at times, as fine natures will suffer sorely tried by sorrows. There were days when the desire to fly from everything seized her, and she and Lady Dee would be off, with poor Ben following on Panther. They would fly through the hills—a picture that, in days remote, might have merited captivity by some dreamy Shawnee chief. Again, she would take to the skiff, and while Ben pulled beyond the Ledge she would talk of home in far Kentucky and the friends they had left there.

CHAPTER IV.

“I HAVE ALWAYS—ALWAYS LOVED YOU.”

ALLAN had been a guest on the island several times since Clara Lansing's visit. City life, with the conventions so rigidly maintained, slowly produces the inscient felicity so readily gained from country hospitality. A dozen or more calls at the town house might not have brought about the entanglement so thoroughly and completely achieved through one or two visits to the country home.

Thus, with rather disturbed and quickening thoughts, he found himself at a small dining, and, contrary to expectations, the vis-a-vis of the charming person he had hoped to entirely appropriate. She blushed, smiled and fondled June roses, which the person he suddenly despised had ordered from the city. And Dorothy failing to gain Allan's attention, remarked, with the fascinating charm of the tease:

“You know, they”—meaning Maithale and Ruford—
“are engaged.”

He had vouchsafed the same information to Lawrence two weeks before, yet did not consider himself a tease.

A fearful ardor gets into the veins of a man when the being he loves—even though he has no claim—bestows her affection upon another. That she loved Ruford was inconceivable, maddening; but that Ruford aspired to her affections was hardly to be borne. And yet, here were

the two engaged! How was it possible? He might have won in time. He assured himself that Clara Lansing was wearying of his fervorless love. Love! Bah! He had never loved her at all.

How minutely every little detail passed in his mind! He remembered even that Silas Scott, who had been in his town on business, spending his leisure, as was his wont, in his office, had, only the day before the dining, talked incessantly of Maithale, nearly giving opinions straight of men who allowed certain opportunities to pass.

However, even as he mused Ruford took his departure. A message came on the wire, and the ladies no sooner left the room than he hurried away, to the infinite relief of Allan.

The moon is always delightful in June, but on this particular evening it flooded the landscape with weird allurements, and Allan, finding himself the companion of Maithale, ventured into its influence.

Ben's notion of cheeriness—the huge log on the big brass fire-logs in the music-room—rather exceeded his intention. Even Aunt Helen complained of suffocation, and Dorothy found the good excuse for a row upon the river! But only six could be comfortably seated in the boat, so Allan and Maithale loitered behind.

Waving gaily to the little party, they walked leisurely up the bank, finally arriving at the ascent, which they were slow in climbing; but he assisted nicely, the ground in places being uncertain. They were quite in the path before either spoke, for silence is sweetest when night is meditating, and his light touch upon her arm was the feeling of comradeship. They might have gone on thus to the veranda had not the lambent satellite suddenly set forth silvery beams to mix with shadows that soft

winds rocked from tree to tree. They paused to admire, and were caught in a snare. Shadows belong to night—but the moon's purpose is ever to push them aside, and the merry contending is the rapture, ecstasy and exquisite delight of the spell that entices mortal man beyond his sterner purpose into the bosom of its dreaming.

It had been happiness enough to walk with her, to feel her presence! She spoke, and verily the soul of evening dropped between them with sheltering wings.

"Oh," she cried softly, her eyes on the sprinkled path, "what is moonlight, anyway?"

And he retorted, with a low note stolen from her voice:

"Search me!"

"Search me!" she echoed.

They laughed lightly. And then they arrived at the Court, where the big trees were scintillating with silvery beams, and the shadows were flat upon the ground. And who may withstand the blandishments of the White Romancer?

They should have gone on to the veranda, where Aunt Helen waited, and Mr. Dale was anxious to talk. But the soothing June-wind song was in the trees; and it is sweet to listen! And while they listened the voice that speaks in the dusk whispered things that became part of the enchantment.

He touched the pretty shawl, drew it snugly about her shoulders, and, looking straight into her eyes, forgot to question.

A sort of rustling in the bushes attracted both for a moment, and then he found his words putting a riotous strand of the golden-brown hair to order.

"Might I?"

But his kiss had already lingered upon her lips.

"Might you?" she whispered, softly nestling to his side.

"Yes, if I had been sooner," he gave back with rising passion.

Her eyes were wide, questioning.

"Before Ruford, I mean."

"Don't tease!" she laughed softly.

"It is not true!" he cried, sudden conviction sweeping his senses. "Dorothy was jesting! Oh, I knew, I knew," holding her close.

"Why, surely you knew." And his cheek was damp with her sweet breath as she chidingly confessed:

"And you believed that of me? Why, dear——!" with tender voice: "I have always—always loved you."

She reached up tip-toe—Allan was very tall—and kissed him.

CHAPTER V.

BEN WAS THE WITNESS.

MORNING mists hang in the mountains, gray and still as smoke in a painted picture; and over the lawns, fields and pastures transparent veils await, beyond the rising hour, the warm fingers of the sun.

Ben was not aware of the rents his big feet made in Morning's spangled gauze as he strode across the lawn, but, stamping his dew-soaked brogans, he entered a rudely-fashioned door, which creaked as it opened, disturbing the slumbers of the occupant of the room.

The man in bed stirred, turned uneasily about, sat bolt upright, and the shuffling step paused in the middle of the room.

"Have I overslept?" asked the man in bed.

"No, boss; I jest crept 'round to put a log on."

Ben clung with certain tenacity to the early form of address. His language, too, was something remote. He held to certain idioms, and resented corrections, especially when advanced by the white help, with whom he could not affiliate. He belonged distinctly to the old school.

Putting the basket on the floor, he began to lay the fagots—he had a way of laying fagots interesting to the beholder. Striking a match, he proceeded with much puffing and blowing.

"Hope I didn't disturb you, boss. Young miss told me to give you special attention."

"To which of the young ladies am I indebted?"

"Got only one miss."

Allan propped himself on his elbow and watched the progress of the flame; it went slowly, and he mentally accused Ben of stupidity; yet he remarked, by way of encouragement:

"I love to watch the building of a fire."

"Which kind, boss?"

"Which kind?"

"Yes; there be three kinds—the real, the art'ficial and the natchel. The first mentioned is like this—fagots—yes, boss, real-sticks and twigs. You builds it for a purpose, and it generally answers. The second named is the art'ficial, like you see in pictures. You can't feel it; it don't give out no heat, but it's there. The natchel is that flame in the heart, starts itself, an' if it gets goin' it 'most consumes a body. If you keep adding fuel, yet has no intention to watch it, there's bound to be a conflagration. If you car'lessly or wantonly lets it go out, you apt to freeze in your old age, for there ain't much comfort to be had out of dead ashes; and it ain't easy to build up a natchel fire once it's died down."

The man in bed leaned back, his hands behind his head, musing. He did not smile over the comparison; he understood the sentiment set forth, and it was the sentiment that touched his heart. He was feeling the consuming flame.

"There is in every heart a shrine," he said, with fine antithesis, communing with himself, "and before it hangs the lamp with the lighted taper; the woman one marries does not always occupy the shrine,"

"Ugh! Bad business!"

The fire progressed slowly, and silence fell between the two. Ben might have been turning certain sentences in his mind with a view to effect; Allan's brain, hardly less active, lived again the moonlight revelation, and softer than birds' singing was the melody of words:

"I have always—always loved you."

Ah, what an instrument is the human voice! It was her voice, so full of quality and distinctive sympathy, her voice that from the first had slipped into the deep corridor of his heart, that followed to his home; that spurred him on to the highest achievements—her voice that would be the undying memory.

Ben had crept out of the room; he appeared again with a big log. The flame shot gaily up, and the room filled with a pink glow.

"It's cotched now," he said, hesitatingly.

It is difficult to launch a subject that has been carefully studied for purpose and effect; there is, too often, the chance that the other's penetration will cut it short. Ben's education was deficient. He did not know that the most disinterested hint could claim attention, did it touch, even in the most infinitesimal degree, the lady of one's heart. Ben began his story with a sort of preliminary:

"Yes, I loves the island; it's open and free, like down in Kentuck. A body can move about and get air. Can't do it in New York. Can't see for the life of me what makes Yanks love to crowd. Down in Kentuck every house has its garden, and you don't have to bump into hired folks stiff as Quakers on Sabbath morn every time you turn."

"Why did you leave Kentucky?" Allan knew, but he wanted to keep Ben talking.

"To stay near my young miss."

"Don't ever leave her, Ben."

"There ain't nobody big enough to order me away."

Allan was convinced that it might be difficult, but he made no comment.

A fanciful red leather bellows hung at the side of the mantel. Dorothy hung it there as an ornament, but it served Ben's purpose.

He took the bellows carefully from the nail and began to urge on the fire. A big flame was coaxed up, and the log crackled; a puff of smoke shot the wrong way.

"Oh, say," came from the bed, "put that thing up," Prompt obedience followed on this occasion.

"You're right, Mr. Allan, boss; this thing is just a toy."

"The Dales is fine people." Ben launched his subject squarely. "Miss Dorothy is a fine lady, and her Aunt Helen is a fine woman, though, I must allow, a powerful suggester. Mr. Dale's a gent'man, fust-class; but I don't get on more 'an so-so with the hired folks. I never could take orders from common white people, and I ain't beginning. That's why I waits on table, and that's why I'm coachman. Why, sakes alive! Miss Dorothy was for having a reg-i-ment up here, but her pa stood 'm off. 'If Ben says,' he says, 'that he kin manage, I pre-fer to keep Sampson'—that's the white dude coachman—"in town, and John Henry,"—that's the most no 'count butler, Mr. Allan, boss, that the Lord ever let live. Well, I bet you, Sampson and that housekeeper has don' turn that mansion into a Irish boardin'-house by this time."

Ben paused, glancing at Allan, who lay back in the pillows with eyes closed; and his spirits fell. He shoved his big foot into the open grate, rolling the log, and ventured:

"They ain't no angels up above finer'n Miss Maithеле. A body don't know how to talk about her. She jest has ways, an' they ain't to be im'tated."

The man was wide awake.

The sun mounting with an army of beams across the Ledge, a happy radiance flooded the Isle of Lechaw-Hanna. Ben opened the window, sniffed the fresh air, and lowered the sash again.

"I guess the house is moving now," and Ben hung Allan's coat on a peg and began diligently with the brush on the hat; then, walking over to the door leading from Allan's apartment, he peeped in. Allan anticipated:

"Mr. Lawrence went home last night with Mr. Ruford."

"You can't place no dependence on the spirits of love," sweeping the air with his big black hand.

Allan's brows contracted, and Ben pitched headlong into the subject:

"I remember you well, Mr. Allan, boss, when you come to Kentuck six year ago. Miss Maithеле were jest a chile; but she thought she was old enough to be out'n society—we all humored her some. You see her ma was dead only about a year. Don't you remember, boss, that awful cold you had in your head——"

"Why, yes—yes—of course I remember," encouragingly.

"An' the lemon juice that Susan made for you?"

"Yes, I remember that, too."

"If Calline—that was Susan's gal—hadn't of hilt her mouf open for drippin', before the Lord there wouldn't a bin that disturbance that ther' was that evenin'. You can't 'spute with a mammy agin her natchel chile. The spirit of flame was contin'allly heatin' up Susan. Well,

I suppose Miss Maithale has don' tole you; but here's the way of it:

"I walks off that night, an' come nigh never comin' back on account of Calline. That was why you didn't see Miss Maithale before yo' left. Miss Maithale was givin' it to Calline, an' I forgot to tell her you was waitin' to say good-by, till you was gone. Oh, it's bin on my conscience all these years what I done. When you was gone I told her that you certainly did ask pertic-lar for her, and waited and waited. She turned on me sudden—and mebbe Calline had the laugh on me, but she laid low with it. 'Ben,' said Miss Maithale, 'how did you dare! An' now he's gone.'

"She broke down and cried—Lor' how she did cry; she was so dis'pointed."

Ben gathered up the basket of empty fagots and disappeared, the door creaking after him, and Allan leaned back upon the pillows, with arms limp and eyes fastened upon the crackling wood. The room was in a pink glow; he did not notice—his thoughts hung like a single rain-drop on a thread. He recalled the dip of the oar and the slight rustle through the bushes the night previous as he strolled with Maithale. Ben was the witness!

Presently through the glass pane a stream of warm gold filled his vision, the rain-drop fell; mind and heart, thoroughly awakened, lived with a proof stronger than revelation. She had always—always loved him. He sat bolt upright, brought his hands forcibly together, muttered something inaudible. In another moment he was making a hurried toilet. Time must be gained. He was sorry to hurry away without a good-by, but he had quite forgotten—his note to Aunt Helen explained—a case in court that very morning.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COURTSHIP OF SILAS SCOTT.

"ON dad's side I belong to the clan of warfaring in kilts. On ma's side Homé Rulers—preferring the new kentry for ruling. Dad was born in Mohawk—Ma in Philadelphia. That's my pedigree."

Dorothy laughed and Maithéle joined in. Silas Scott continued:

"Howsomever, I'm not enclin'd to hang on to any of the branches, an', as I was saying, Injuns wiped out the genuine stock. Ma was a waif of good stock an' standing, thet growed up wethout a commod'ous eddication, but with fer-stretching principles thet made us kids walk straighter than the kids of these days. In my own right, I'm American—tip-top, without any attachments to foreign sod or any convictions contrary to George Washington."

Silas Scott was a powerfully built man. His features were well-cut and defined, his face clean-shaven, the mouth especially generous, displaying in the hearty laugh, fine teeth. Eyes undecided in color, expressive. And the iron-gray hair, which no one had ever seen too closely cropped, left the temples bare.

He generally wore a round jacket, fancy vest, and striped trousers turned up at the bottom. On occasions he was rather elegant in black cutaway, and in the summer often a delight to behold in white duck, immaculate shirt and buff tie.

"I never was a 'lady-killer'," he declared, as they waited the ferry; "and I had a devil of a time getting Louisa."

He paused, and Maithale, fearing the story of the courtship might slip, jogged his memory.

"Well, daughter," he began, "Louisa lived ten mile down the Valley, weth her dad an' a old maid aunt—freckled as a turkey egg and mean as pizen. But Louisa was above an' beyont my expectations. I never did git the chanst to court her decent, owing to her aunt, who was set aginst me for reasons never yet explaint, an' my own unsociable desposition. I used to hear about the fellers, one 'special red-head chap thet hed a soft snap taking Louisa to dances, and I spent many a night meditating on tregiddies that never took place. Wa'al, I made up my mind thet thet girl would end up the dance weth me, an' she did. I use' to spend half on every second Saturday watching the hired boy curry the hoss an' help me spruce to go courting. And it's a solemn fact that I was rejected over one hundred times. I can prove it by Louisa; she claims to thes day I didn't go 'bout it right. Wa'al, mebbe I did an' mebbe I didn't. But I use' to sidle up to her door every second Saturday, and there me an' the hoss would stand. Presently I'd call out: 'Louisa! Oh, Louisa!' An' in about a minute the puttiest head would pop out of the setting-room window."

Scott paused to smile with fond recollection and proceeded:

"An' it would seem to me as if all the soft notes of forest birds would get into her throat when she'd answer back: 'Here I am, Silas!' Then I'd steady myself so'st to git my voice real firm, an' I'd enquire, with a hum an' haw, 'How'dy, Louisa?' And she'd answer

back, 'How'dy, Si!' Then I'd ast, shyer'n a kite, 'Air you well?' 'Fine,' she'd call back. I alwus felt as if I hed got through the fust of the pufformance when thet was through, an' I'd take a long breath. Then, after about four minutes waiting for my heart to stop beating, I'd git courage to look straight into her eyes—which wa' alwus twinkling like stars—an' I'd say, bracing up, 'Louisa, will you hev me?' 'No, I won't,' she'd say—an' slam-bang would go the window. No use hanging around after thet, an' I'd jest tetch old sorrel weth the switch an' home we'd go."

"But," inquired Dorothy, hearing the story for the first time, "did you never go inside the house? Did you always sit upon that old sorrel horse and court Louisa—I mean, Mrs. Scott?"

"I went inside only onct; I guess thet was the hundre'th time—an' I got her."

"Well," said Maithale, "I should never treat the man I loved like that."

"Now, daughter, don't be too swift; it's real nettling, I admit, to be kept dangling by a hair, but——" His attention was at once called to Lady Dee, who, as usual, showed her disapproval of ferry-boats by capers becoming to herself, but most perilous to the fair equestrian, who stubbornly refused to dismount. The landing was effected, however, without disaster, and Scott, assisting Maithale, whispered softly:

"We ain't seen you at our place for a spell."

"So many guests——" she apologized.

"Louisa wants to see you about suthen perticler. If you hevn't any engagement for to-morrow, an' if it's convenient?"

Thus the following morning Maithale set forth. The air was sweet with odoriferous blooms; the birds were

singing, and the sun, like a great coreopsis, adorning the vale. At every turn of the winding road the green hills sloped, and the Susquehanna coming into view broadly, clearly, permitted gentle discernment into its seemingly thoughtless but ever intelligent cause.

Ben had tried to be jocose as they set out, but, with ready intuition, he recognized the inopportune moment, and fell back a few yards from his charge.

So many guests had come and gone since the day of the dining that Maithale hardly found lesiure to reflect upon her own tragedy, for so it seemed.

Sincerity is not to be doubted; there is once in every life when truth stands revealed. But even so, Love, intuitive in its perceptions, finds the speck, infinitesimal though it be, upon the horizon. The speck acquired proportions as Maithale lifted her eyes to the peaked beauty of the hills and rehearsed the story. There had always been something, she reflected. She recalled the first meeting in the Dale's home—how warmly Allan's hands clasped hers—as their eyes met, then the turning away—it was ever so. During the first winter she had seen him but twice; the whole of the second year she was abroad. He had written one letter; she had it yet; she recalled everything so minutely, even the joy of returning to America, which, in her secret heart, meant meeting Richard Allan once more. But they were six months returned before he put in an appearance. Then she noted a strange thing—his eyes with all their depth followed her; yet it was Dorothy who claimed all his attention. She was prepared for the declaration in the soft moonlight, but not for the silence that followed. She recalled how he had gone off the following day like one under a cloud. Even the mail—love's white-winged messenger—eluded her.

"Oh, you silly!" she cried out. A striped squirrel shooting across the road, frightened Lady Dee, and the reverie, broken at this point, gathered thread again, but of darker weaving.

"Could it be possible?" she murmured, suspicion fastening upon her mind. She recalled many occasions, the costume ball the season passed, how he had shadowed Dorothy, a beautiful Carmen to the end of the evening, while she danced, danced, danced—with men she hated. And how Dorothy had talked for a week of Richard, Richard, until her jealous heart cried aloud.

Thus she came to the turn in the road, and the mare's speed slackened going down to the river's edge. The reeds were high, green and soft as velvet, and as she gazed upon them, a new sensation fraught with certain pain crept into her heart. Almost as high as the reeds a wild growth, dotted all over with flowers looking like little pink shells, attractively won her. Swinging her arm forward, she gathered a handful of the pretty things, but the flowers were viscous and their odor offensive.

"Bah!" she cried, opening her palm, "to look so beautiful and be so bad." And the wind picked the flowers up and tossed them out upon the stream, and—away they sped.

The onward course of the river, the flower that she threw upon it, filled her eyes, or was it something besides? The aqueous mist, perhaps, welling up from the river of her own heart?

"Richard! Richard!" she cried almost under her breath; then, gently touching Lady Dee, up the green slope into the road, on she sped, distancing Panther a full half mile; at last she slackened pace and Ben came jogging up.

"For the Lord sake, Miss Maithale, Panther an' me certainly am done up."

"I had no idea, Ben, you were so far behind."

"Indeed, honey," he answered, with the familiarity he often assumed, "then you haven't ideas this morning. 'Behind?' Well, I think we was! Now, honey, don't you do that no more! We certainly was out of sight, and Panther is don' up."

"I'm sorry, Ben. I forgot the youth of Lady Dee when I let her go."

"You certainly did, Miss Maithale, honey."

"Now Ben, the house is in sight. Call for me about dusk."

With a smile she was off on a light canter, but Ben walked to the side of the road, and his eyes followed the frivolous Lady Dee until he saw her stop before the house of Silas Scott.

"Thank Gawd!" he piously ejaculated, as he mounted Panther again, turning his face southward.

"That chile and that mare is too much for me. I'm getting old, I sho'ly am."

Silas Scott was seated at his door, deep in the morning paper, as Maithale drew rein.

"Here she is, Louisa, here she is," he called. But the lady had sighted the arrival.

"Silas!" (from within) "Go help that child. Lor', she's jumped,"

"Ye going to git kilt some day," said Silas, greeting her warmly. "I don't like that mare, no how; there's difference between a prankish hoss an' a prankish dog."

Running to the house she was met by Louisa, hands uplifted.

"Can't tetch you, dearie. Our hired girl can't make pie-crus' to suit thet husband of mine. Take warning,

take warning, child. Don't begin cooking when you marry; a man may be consid'rate in every other respect, but if you cook to suit him then nobody else can long as you be wethin call." She said all this in a breath, and Maithale laughing kissing her cheek.

Meanwhile, Silas was trying to lead Lady Dee around to the stable. The mare coquetting, Silas misunderstood.

"Con'soun' ye, I'll——" What he would have done will never be recorded, for at that moment he caught sight of Louisa and Maithale through the kitchen window.

"If I could keep them two," he said softly, "alwus together, I'm 'feared I wouldn't be hank'ring for Perradise," at which pious reflection Lady Dee jerked, showing her aversion to dogs.

"Come along, don't put on," he continued. "Thet pup's jest the Scout of the army. Ted is the natural born ag'ressive. Ye ain't met him yet. Come, come, pull into the stable like a lady; ye'll fine oats to your taste."

But the Scout had given the alarm, and the air was full of yelping. Lady Dee held back, and Silas tugged at the bridle.

"Con'soun ye, I'll larrup your flanks."

A farm hand, observing the trouble, came to Scott's assistance, but the fellow grabbed at the mare's tail, fortunately failing to get the coveted ribbon.

"Mighty powers! Ain't you got 'nough sense to know hoss tail from dog tail?" yelled Scott.

Instantly the animal lifted her hind legs and the hired man vanished; the dogs, too, held back cautiously, save Teddy R., who sprang upon the mare's back, biting at the bridle.

"For the Lord!" exclaimed Louisa, hanging out of the

kitchen window, "if Ted ain't doin' the rough-rider!"

Lady Dee pricked her ears; her mistress was running down the path.

Maithеле arrived upon the scene, and at once proceeded to pat the mare's head.

"Sweet Lady Dee—good girl!"

The animal whinnied, clawing the ground with her fore hoof, and Ted jumped off.

Maithеле opened the palm of her hand, and the mare found the lump of sugar which she crunched, following like a lamb to the stable, rubbing her nose at every pause against Maithеле's sleeve. And as they arrived at the stable door a voice called from the house.

A livery stable horse was at the gate.

"Wa'al I'll swan," Scott declared, going toward the house. "I'll set her up agin any other girl of her size in the kentry.

The Scott house stood back some fifty feet from the avenue. It was a frame structure, with solid brick foundation—a style of architecture that combined the old with the new. The color of the house was light gray, the gables deep red.

"I dunno as I like it much," said Scott, the first time Maithеле mentioned the effect, "but the feller thet put on the paint has a repitation for style, so I says, 'If ye say so, it goes.' Any way the red tetches do match the chimbleys."

The Scott farm was not extensive; in fact, Scott was not very fond of farming.

"We keeps," he would say, with a twinkle in his eye, "most of the land for the benefit of the dogs." He did not traffic in dogs, though he would travel miles to bargain for a dog he had set his mind on; and the only deception he ever practiced on Louisa was the fabulous



“THEY AIN’T FIT FOR MORE’N BRIC-A-BRAC IN A
FELLER’S YARD.”

prices paid for some of the canines. Dogs were his one extravagance.

He eased his conscience by repeating to himself on occasions: "What she dunno, won't hurt." And, as he declared to Mr. Dale one day:

"There's only me an' Louisa, an' she's fixed handsome in event I'm took off. I'm entitled to spend some of my own money. I did git conscience-struck the time I bought the Toy spaniels, because Louisa hed ast me to put stain-glass windies in Cousin Polly's church, an' I refused. Not because I grudged the money to the church, but because I didn't like the bumping nerve of Polly. Wa'al, anyway," he continued, "when I marched in an' set the spaniels down, Louisa declared: 'Of all the ugly things!' 'Wa'al, I says, 'they be considered right chic by society.' 'Now, what's thet hifalutin word?' said Louisa. 'It means,' says I, 'drest up to N'York. But I guess,' I says to her, 'I better quit buying dogs.' 'You don't do no sich thing,' says she, 'it's jest the same to me, heving twenty as ten dogs in the yard. So long as you don't take to ginny-hens an' hogs—I say, spend your own money to suit yourself; you must hev' some amusement, Si,' and, said she, 'when your own money's spent, I'll lend ye mine; I got a knitted stocking full of coin hid away.'"

Si chuckled, telling this yarn, and added, with a wink:

"It would take more'n a knitted stocking full of savings to buy the spaniels, an' they ain't fit for more'n bric-a-brac in a feller's yard.

CHAPTER VII.

SOMETHING IS WRONG.

Having satisfied herself that Lady Dee would not be annoyed by the dogs, Maithale sauntered to the house, gathering violets as she went. The wild specimens grow exuberantly in this part of the State between August and October.

June roses were in her cheeks; they were always there—and soft breezes had gone recklessly with her tresses; the stiff brush was needed as a corrector. She meant only to lay the bone-handled crop where she might find it again before running up to her room. As she paused upon the threshold of the living-room, she beheld Allan sitting at the round table, his gaze fixed upon a map spread before him.

Surprise rooted her to the spot, and she stood one joyous moment, red lips apart, and the light of summer in her eyes.

"A pleasure I had not anticipated," said he, going forward, both hands extended. Finding a place for the crop, she spoke:

"I would not have come if I had known."

"Glad that you did not."

She dropped nicely into a chair, bending at once over the map spread upon the table. It is so easy to find the good excuse for the misconduct of one whom one loves! The extenuating circumstance would develop to clear

him presently; she would be patient. It is not fair to judge one on the instant, nor without justice, and it seemed but last night that she listened to the story, so sweet, so tender, that once told is proved only by the retelling. Had he repented all the passion and fervor the story contained? Was he afraid, ashamed to rehearse it? He should have his chance, but she should not invite it. Thus she assured herself, slowly beginning to make conversation:

"I do not know east from west; my education has been neglected."

"You know enough to manage animals."

"Oh, that performance?"

At this juncture Scott stood framed in the doorway.

"Say, the dogs air in a huff, jealous over Lady Dee an' her," jerking his head in Maithele's direction.

"I'm going to give 'em a run—be back in a half hour, if you can git along without my company," chuckling, "thet long. Louisa says, 'Excuse her, if ye both got app'tites.'"

Tim Shinn, eager to be off, jumped up and down.

"I will go to Mrs. Scott's assistance," said Maithele, rising.

"Now set right down. Louisa won't hev' any one in the kitchen when she's baking lemon pies."

"She won't mind me, Mr. Scott."

"She'd mind the Angel Gabriel. He'll hev' to blow thet trumpet on a off day, if he wants Louisa to stand stiddy, and hear his tune. I never try arg'ments on her when the pie is about ready an' the oven red hot. I tried it onct, an' I got dough in my stomach for about a month. Give him a tune, ther's the pianny an' the violin." His hand swept in the direction of the instruments.

"You need not talk," said Allan, when the door closed upon Scott, "if you do not care to. I am trying to locate a bit of land. I am here on business. If my presence annoys you, I will take the map outside."

What a little thing will sting!

This, then, was his attitude.

"It might be as well; you are here on business, and I must remain in this room, it seems, until Mrs. Scott is through with the lemon pies—I hate lemon pies!"

He did not vouchsafe a remark, did not seem to hear, and she questioned sharply:

"There are no maps in your town, I suppose?"

"A few. Scott owns the land we want. I'm engaged on his map."

"Should that make any difference?" She walked over to the window and looked out.

The view was fair, indeed. The lovely green lawn ended in a riotous climbing of morning glories, scarlet runners and dewy bells over a low wicket fence garlanded again on the opposite side as far as the eye could reach.

An open field of waving green filled a space beyond which a clump of primeval forest trees, looking dwarfed and frail, swept at the base of terraced hills touched with a blue-purple haze.

For several moments she gazed upon the prospect, with eyes unseeing, but her attention was arrested by a great buzzard swooping downward to the edge of the field—another—still another; around and around they whirled, then down, down upon their prey.

Her heart, disturbed enough that day, rose up in wrath against the scavengers.

"Poor little dead bird or rabbit," she sighed, "entitled, I should think, to a grave."

For the moment she had forgotten the man, but his voice recalled his presence. She turned slightly.

"If you will come back," at the same time drawing the chair she had but a few moments ago occupied nearer to his own, "I will talk books, anything you like." Apparently she did not hear, and he went on:

"I am quite sure the view is beautiful, but——"

"It was," she answered; "it is spoiled by four horrid buzzards."

"Buzzards are not bad; they have a right to live."

"Not on the innocent dead."

"Dead what? Why, they are just scavengers."

"I wish you would go out there and see what they are devouring."

"Oh, now, you are not getting rid of me like that. Do come back; this chair looks lonely. I want to tell you something."

She was immovable.

"I learned incidentally, the other day, that you had taken to literature," he ventured.

"And I learned since the other day, that you are assuming the ways of a diplomat."

"Why should I?" Who are diplomats?"

"Mr. Dale is my authority; he declares they are 'people who say nothings to make other people laugh!'"

"Then I am not one; my mission seems the contrary."

Her cheeks were scarlet, but her face was turned from him.

"You haven't answered my question," he went on with quiet impetus.

"Why should I?"

"That is *one* on diplomatic pastime. Be good," he almost whispered.

"I don't mind helping you to find the land."

She softened.

"If you would."

She gave her attention at once to the map.

The meeting had unnerved her from the first, and her interest in the map was merely an excuse.

For several moments neither spoke. Presently his eyes lifted. She felt their earnestness.

"Titian," he whispered, as a little breeze, waving the lace curtain put to greater disorder a shining strand of the wavy hair.

"Where is Titian?"

"A trifle higher than your eyes."

"Is it land?"

"Gold!"

"And you—" she put her hand upon the map—"are trying to locate it?"

"I have located it. The difficulty is to get possession of it."

She sighed.

"White as snow!" he murmured.

Her eyes interrogated, but he only lifted the hand to his lips. She withdrew it gently.

And he fell into a mood, beginning a new theme with:

"Ruford and Lawrence are——"

She interrupted:

"The land you love must be at the north pole. I explained my stupidity about geography. Show me the land?"

His head swayed gently.

"I—I—thought I had it a moment ago, but an iceberg came along and the vessel receiving a hurt turned the other way."

"One shouldn't venture upon the high seas in a poor craft. I remember," she hurried on, feigning ignorance,

"the ocean; we saw an iceberg. It was a beautiful sight, the sun full upon it. I went into ecstasy over its prismatic loveliness, but the captain rather put a damper upon my ardor by remarking: 'If you should have the misfortune to run into an iceberg you would hardly be so gay over it.'"

She glanced at Allan, expecting argument or nice retort, but icebergs were passed. He studied the map; made several entries in a small book, returned the book to the side pocket of his coat, and remarked, beginning a chapter:

"When I first met you, you were—ten?"

"Fifteen!"

She sat far back in the big chair, her face inscrutable.

"Tell me," he said, reverently, touching the bunch of violets tucked in the ribbon belt, "tell me truly, did you—did you care for that boy? What was his name—Walter?"

She laughed softly.

"Yes, we were engaged."

"And that was before I went south?"

Her face brightened. There is a certain joy, even in the moment of perplexity, in recalling tender recollections.

"Mother did not dream that Walter and I were in love."

"Couldn't have found it out in a dozen years."

"One Christmas morning, Walter appeared before me as I sat in the library, pondering over a book—a gift of the day. Well, Walter did not say a word, he just walked right up to me and kissed me."

"Villain!" cried Allan, softly.

"We heard a step, and thrusting something into my

hand, he flew ; but mother stood in the open door. Well, Walter was compelled to take back his ring."

Maithale held out her hand, displaying a diamond cluster. Allan examined it without comment.

"My troubles began early."

Her voice faltered, but she hurried on as if anxious to be through with the narrative:

"Mother died a few months after the ring episode. Walter died with fever the year after you came. You remember brother Tom——"

Her voice caught half-way between a sob and a sigh.

"Tom was drowned."

Allan's eyes closed to hide their full tender sympathy.

Hoping to divert her mind from the greater tragedy, he inquired:

"And the ring?"

"Walter's aunt sent it and asked me to wear it always."

"You would have married Walter I suppose, had he lived."

"No! No!" she spoke hurriedly. "I discovered before he died that I loved some one else."

"Sweet little jessamine!" he murmured under his breath. He twirled the locket on his chain, recalling Ben's story.

"Six years ago," he began, reflectively, "a young fellow went south ; he was a struggler, he needed a holiday."

A pensive loneliness fell upon Maithale as Allan resumed:

"He met a sweet girl."

After a moment of endless silence Maithale, thirsting for knowledge, broke in:

"Proposed—married—and lived happily ever after?"

"No. He went home again. He meant to say something; the night before his departure, he made love to her, teased about another fellow and—threatened to kidnap her."

Her cheeks were very rosy and her heart was beating high with the joy of expectancy.

"When he found her again——"

He paused; how could he tell her? His heart was cold with fear. She had grown dearer, dearer to him, since the night of the revelation, but woman's prerogative is often the nice help.

"I suppose she was married?"

"Not so bad as that."

Her eyes were upon the floor as he added:

"He was engaged to another."

The bolt fell.

But a courageous woman will hold herself resolutely at the point of the bayonet, and, without the slightest hesitation or tremor, she replied:

"He must have cared frightfully to have sacrificed himself."

Allan felt the sting, but his purpose was fixed. He would have died rather than hurt her, and for no consideration would he lose her. He meant only to sound the warning note, and hold her confidence. He had been premature. Clara Lansing was wearying, perhaps, in a few days he should be dismissed. Hope was opening the way with its arnica that soothes love's wound. But it is fate that generally interposes. Allan was ready with a certain sweet phrase as preliminary when Mrs. Scott appeared in the room.

"Wa'al I didn't know tell thes minute thet you two was left alone. It do beat all!" Mrs. Scott went on without pausing for breath; "if it wa'n't for dogs Si

would be polite an' sociable as any. But I do believe if the King of England was visiting him, an' General or Ted wanted a favor, the King would hev' to set an' wait till the dogs was humored. I sometimes wish the Lord hed give us children. They couldn't a bin more trouble, possibly less, an' hardly 's contrary. There's Tasso, thet Si calls the Ital'an po-et! Yeste'dy he et the Bible up; he chewed it the same as Si chews his tobacco quid. Si laughed when I told him. 'Wa'al' he said, 'a po-et 's a po-et. Some of 'em hangs on to thet sort of lit'ature, grinding an' chewing till they finds an idee; then they sets about in their own heads for a rhyme, which sometimes hatches an' sometimes don't; but it's alwus original, because they done it, which is the main thing."

Allan's face was buried in the map, while Maithale gazed out of the window.

"Read much po'try, Mr. Allan? Si can spend hull hours at it."

"Oh, yes, I am very fond of poetry, Mrs. Scott."

"Si said the other night 'spect you be kin to Edgar Allan Poe. Poe's the man thet wrote a fine poem about an owl thet crept into his room one night an' set on his wife's bust. I didn't thenk thet was jest the theng to write about."

"Oh, you have it wrong, Mrs. Scott," put in Allan, while Maithale tried to recall the features of the Sphinx.

"Poe fancied the bird was the spirit of his dead wife, the bird perched upon a bit of sculpture—the bust of Pallas."

"Now Si must hev' read it wrong."

Scott came into the room quietly.

"Wa'al I'll swan, Louisa; thought ye'd all be setting to dinner time I got back, an' here you be gossiping about your natural provider."

"Somebody must hev' manners, Si, but dinner's served."

"The rules of this house ain't many," said Scott. And Maithale, seizing an advantage, ran up the stairway. On the landing she paused, patting Tasso, who followed, throwing herself at once into a chair.

"Well," she said, rocking slowly, and again, "Well, well! To think I should find him here!" Yet how the speck grew!

"I knew there was something," she went on, musing. "Pledged! To whom?"

She rocked, rocked, repeating the words. But her reverie was broken by the genial voice of the hostess:

"Come right along, Maithale; don't stop to fix up."

"I'm coming, dear Mrs. Scott," she answered cheerily.

"We must not keep them waiting," she said to Tasso, adjusting a bow, smoothing her hair, and straightening the ribbon belt.

"I think that will do," nodding approvingly to the reflection in the mirror. "I might have looked real sweet, but, of course, I never dreamed of seeing him here, Tasso!"

She grabbed up the little white dog, lifting him to the table. He was obedient and deeply attached to her.

"Now, see here," shaking her finger, "the story of your bad conduct interrupted, broke into the most beautiful chapter of my life. See here!"

The dog looked frightened.

"Don't do it again; you know——" her voice fell to a whisper.

"He loves me, but there is something wrong. He was engaged—but—not now, except—look up, you little white ball—except to me!"

"Daughter," came the voice from below: "Dick hes

your soup enstead of his, an' it's nearly e't up. Come on if you got any app'tite."

And down the steps she flew with a rosy face, Tasso following, yelping all the way.

CHAPTER VIII.

ENGAGED TO WHOM?

SCOTT and Allan drove off in the top buggy, and Mrs. Scott, giving minute instructions to the hired girl, invited Maithele upstairs.

"I was for heving thes room new papered," entering a cozy apartment where the summer previous Maithele had spent a delightful week, "but Si put his foot down, 'Leave it alone, Louisa,'—thet's jest what he said. 'Don't tetch it; it ain't exactly your room, neither mine; it's Maithele's, and if we go to making changes she mightn't feel the same to it.'"

"Dear Mr. Scott! Do you know sometimes when I wake at night I fancy I am here again, and I long for the dawn, that I may see the blue bells running all over the ceiling and the long tendrils dropping over the walls."

"When those sort of feelings come on, dearie, you better pack right up an' come thes way. Thes room ain't going to change, being as you like it, an' it's yours as long as you live an' we live. An' it's not only welcome you be, but happy we'd be to hev' you alwus. We hed several days last winter that was so dismal thet even me and Si got lonely. I said finally one morning, 'They ain't ben a streak of sunshine in thes house for three days.' 'You're right,' says Si, an' he added, 'if it don't brighten soon, I'll hev' to travel to N'York and git Maithele an'

bring her up to the valley. We wouldn't feel the gloominess if she was around.' ”

Maithale laid her hand gently on Mrs. Scott's arm; the other understood. She was thinking of that fine heart-quality that creates the feeling of kindred, and is one of the gifts of good lineage. Cultivation, education, merely nurtures the quality to its finest outward expression, it cannot create it. Without advantages the quality is preëminently the same. Thus Maithale knew assuredly that Scott and his wife came of good stock.

Mrs. Scott led the way to her own apartment, which, like the living-room below, was airy and sweet. On the handsome walnut bureau stood a slim vase of newly cut ferns, and on the small table near the bed, a shallow bowl of those funny blooms Mrs. Scott called johnnie-jump-ups. Maithale held one of the velvety things between the first finger and thumb as she seated herself in the low rocker.

“I wanted you to come by yourself,” began Mrs. Scott, “so's we could talk. I didn't calculate heving Dick Allan around.”

“Don't you like him?”

“Oh, he's got uncommon good sense for a man, but it's sort of upset my plans. I want to ast you about some things thet me and Si hev' bin talking over.”

Regarding Maithale earnestly she inquired:

“You comfortable dearie, in thet chair?”

“Delightful.”

“Why, then, as I was saying, off—course, me an' Si's kentry; we don't expec' city folks to do our way, no more'n we expec' to do ther'n. But I says to Si a few nights back, ‘If we get to visiting the Dale's reguler, we'll hev' to hev' more clothes.’ I declare 'cept my wedden' dress, thet's white, an' jes' fit for balls, an' my

black silk thet hikes up in front an' I ben wearing it so much to funerels thet I can't feel sociable in it—wa'al, 'cept them two, I'm clear out of clothes. I want you to go to N'York weth me one day next week an' not let on to the folks; Si says, 'Don't mind expense.' So I was thenking, as spending money is confusing, to sort of plan what we needed."

Malthele was glad to be of small service, and the list was made with much talk and jollyng on both sides.

Later on, Mrs. Scott brought out the crazy quilt, which elicited the girl's genuine admiration. The noon passed pleasantly.

Twilight was running its long fingers through the trees and picking pale sunbeams from hilltops, as Mrs. Scott threw open the shutter.

"Guess we need more daylight!" she said, pulling from under the bed a wooden chest. She tugged at it until she had it in the middle of the room.

Midway between newspapers neatly spread was something carefully folded in a white sheet. With the care one handles an infant, Mrs. Scott lifted the bundle from the chest, and laid it carefully upon the bed.

"Oh!" exclaimed Maithale, and again, "Oh!" as Mrs. Scott held the white silk wedding gown to the light.

"I hev' an idee," said Mrs. Scott, "thet it would jest fit you. I wan't a bad looking girl; I had some figger, too, thirty year ago, when Si came courting."

Maithale patted the cheek. "You are a dear, Mrs. Scott," and at once Maithale began to disrobe.

"First, let me arrange my hair. How did you wear yours in those days, Mrs. Scott?"

"Parted in the middle. I'd bring it up like thes."

Maithale caught the idea.

"Thet looks fine," declared Mrs. Scott as Maithale arranged her hair, and continued she:

"I think bride wreaths look so corpsey. Silas sent me one made of white wax orange blossoms day before the wedding, but it didn't go on my head."

"I would hardly care to wear wax orange blossoms myself," laughed Maithale.

"You're about right; they certainly air stiff. Poor Si, hesn't a bit of taste, but he can tell mighty quick if the next one lacks it."

As the toilet progressed Mrs. Scott continued the subject of the proposed shopping tour to New York.

"We can put up at the Manhattan. Thet's a grand hotel, Si says; never ben there myself; I generally stop weth Cousin Kate when I go to the city, but you being along, the best won't be any too good. An' 'steer clear of relations,' Si says, 'an' spend all th' money you want to.' I dunno," she said, reflectively, "how much Si's worth, but I hope we ain't never gitting so rich that lemon pies'll be beyont my hand."

Maithale passed the small diversion with a smile.

"I declare if Si could see you onct, it would take him back."

Maithale was a picture, indeed, worthy of a Florentine setting. The shortwaisted gown had a sort of Empire effect, and, as the girl tilted the mirror and walked half-way down the room to admire herself, she tried to imagine the bride of thirty years back with the Mrs. Scott of to-day.

"Was all this your own idea, Mrs. Scott?"

"No, no indeed. A friend give me the address of a fust-class dressmaker, so I went down to N'York an' hed her measure me up; I remember it as if it had been yes-ty. 'You want it'n the latest style?' she ast. I said,

‘Yes’m, an’ real fine and fancy. Buy the hull thing,’ I said; ‘git all you need.’ Wa’al, she did, an’ more, from the figgers of the bill. I was near paralyzed when I got it. But I hed a snug sum in bank of my own, and I laid a pile of it on thet wedding dress wethout a murmur or regret, for it certainly did take Si. If a real queen hed stood weth me thet morning an’ Si had the choosing between us, she’d hed to stand back. Si never gets through talking about thet dress, an’ he ’lows to this day they ain’t money to buy it, after all these years hev’ passed an’ gone.”

Mrs. Scott went into the adjoining room, returning presently.

“In them days it want queer to see young girls in short sleeves going to parties an’ the like. In these days they don’t wear sleeves at all; howsomever, I recall the parson thet married us looked skittish when he set his eyes on me, an’ my aunt staid away from the ceremony on account of thet dress, but, as Si said, ‘If any man or woman objects to ye, Louisa, it’s sour grapes.’ ”

Mrs. Scott unlocked the bedroom door leading to the hall, and called in a big voice to Prudence:

“Light all the lights in the house an’ do it quick.” Then in a higher key:

“Is thet table set?”

Prudence answered in the affirmative.

“What about the chickens? Hev’ ye made the white gravy?”

Mrs. Scott could not catch the girl’s remark.

“Hey? Hope ye hevn’t scorched it?”

The answer seemed satisfactory and Mrs. Scott returned to the room, proceeding to don the black silk gown.

“I got only one favor,” turning to Maithale; “now,

please don't disappoint me. I want you to wear thet dress to supper. It will make Silas so happy."

"I would love to, Mrs. Scott, but——"

"Now, you're going to stay for supper. Si said when he went off thet he'd see Mr. Dale at the mine, an' tell him you was engaged for the night."

Maithale made no response, and Mrs. Scott drifted into another channel.

"Say, don't you think thet Mr. Lawrence is stuck on Dorothy?"

"Everybody loves Dorothy."

"But who does she love?"

Maithale flushed, passing the question.

"Will Mr. Allan return?"

"Dunno."

"I think I'd better go."

"Ain't you two friendly?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, but——" she looked upon her own reflection in the mirror, and seemed satisfied.

"If you don't want to see him?"

"Oh, I do, but——"

"Now," cut in Mrs. Scott, "thet's the way I used to treat Si. I wanted to see him worse'n anything, but when he would come, I'd act queer an' he would go off. I missed a heap because of my queerness. Don't you be foolish when you like a man, give him a chanst. Every man can't be done like Si. Now, like a dear, walk about in the parlor in thet dress. I want to see how I looked on thet happy day."

Maithale complied reluctantly; she did not mind Silas, she would have danced for him in the bridal gown, but Richard Allan! If he returned what might he think? She felt rather annoyed, she hoped Mrs. Scott would not mind, but she must get the gown off before the men re-

turned. They went below and she walked demurely up and down the length of the long room, to the edification of Mrs. Scott and the delight of Prudence, who, peeping through the open door, exclaimed with the tactless slip of her kind:

"Oh, now, Mrs. Scott, sure you never looked beautiful like her, ma'am."

And as she spoke the barking of dogs announced the master, but Maithale did not realize that the men were in the house until the big voice of Silas Scott broke into the room and, retreat was impossible.

"Wa'al, I'll swan!"

Scott stood in the doorway, his hands thrust deep into his trouser pockets, and the gray slouched hat over the face with the usual tilt.

Allan, standing behind Silas, doffed his hat with that movement that bespeaks respect, and her eyes, sweeping the elder man, fell before the tenderness in his gaze.

"Wa'al, I'll swan!" Scott repeated gently, grabbing his wife about the waist.

"She's the only girl thet could begin to come up to you, an' the way it do fit!"

He turned Maithale about.

"How did you come to get the idee, Louisa?" tossing his hat into a chair.

"If it ain't the very day to a minute thirty years back. Say, Allan!"

But Allan had disappeared.

"Wa'al, I'll swan! How a man could run from sich a bridal vision beats me!"

He looked about the room.

"Wher's the General an'——"

"Not in the parlor, Si."

"Right in the parlor, Louisa; the occasion demands a salute from the General an' Adjutant."

{ A low whistle brought the dogs to the door, which Louisa opened, and in they scrambled, conscience stricken and tails subdued. But in a moment the bull-pup's conduct became unpardonable. He was vigorously thrown into the dark, and as though delighted at his discomfiture, Tasso stood up on his hind legs.

"There's genius for you," shouted Silas. And while he spoke Prudence announced supper. Scott turned upon the dogs, addressing General:

"Lead the army to the rear of the house; there's a anniversary going on inside."

CHAPTER IX.

THE ANNIVERSARY DINNER.

THE table was beautifully arranged, and the four sat down as the clock struck seven.

Pouring a small quantity of wine into his own glass, Scott filled Maithale's and passed the bottle to Allan, who did likewise for Mrs. Scott; when the bottle came back again to Scott he filled his own glass and lifted it:

"Confusion to our enemies, an' may we never fare worse!"

It was Scott's usual preliminary.

"Thes is a day," proceeded the host, standing erect, with his left hand on the table, his right ready for gesture, "the day thet comes onct in every year, the sweetest day in the whole three hundred and sixty-five. I suppose me an' Louisa is some older thin we was thirty year ago thes minute, but we don't feel older, an' it's the way you feel thet counts.

"H'm"—lifting the slim glass of sparkling Burgundy to the light, and placing it again upon the table. "There be women and women," he said reflectively. "When a feller's young, seems as if they was all a parcel of fairies, but, as he keeps studying about 'em, the hull bunch resolves itself into jest one. Fairy exper'ence is sich a razzle-dazzle, ye apt to git ketched before ye be ready to ketch. I seen a red bird onct, thet I wanted; I was a little chap at the time. Pop encouraged me mighty: 'Git some salt,' says he,

'an' when the bird lights to the ground drap the salt on its tail.' I wa'n't smart in them days like the kid chaps as go duding about these days. One day I seen two red birds, then three. Finally the woods was full of 'm." Scott made that funny little noise in the throat preparatory to change of subject. He looked wistfully from the sparkling wine to the placid face of Louisa; then his eyes fell upon Maithele. "They ain't but one woman 'n the hull world for one man," he said. And then, after a pause, shaking his head emphatically. "Thet's God-a-Mighty's truth. Sometimes it's harder to git *thet* woman then it be to put salt on the bird's tail, but the feller ain't wuth shucks thet 'lows her to give him the slip onct he's hed a holt."

He paused, his lips coming together firmly. Then, lifting the glass in Pickwickian style:

"Louisa, here's to you!"

He faced Maithele.

"Your happiness, daughter."

To Allan.

"Yours, Dick."

And when he had drained the glass he went to carving briskly.

Allan's eyes deep upon his vis-a-vis, whispered:

"Rose of Sharon."

"What's thet?" inquired Scott.

"A rose that never dies."

"Good for you, Dick. Maithele's thet kind."

Scott told many yarns, and the fun went round, until Mrs. Scott's head inclined, returning thanks.

As all rose Scott said: "I can't sleep 'less I smoke a ci-gar, an' on a great o-casion like thes, I hev' to hev' about three. What do you say, Louisa?"

"Thet's so."

Putting his arm about his wife he turned to his guests:

"If you will favor us, Maithcle, with a song, I'm thenking the ent'tainment will be about complete; me an' Louisa 'll set out on the verandy an' spoon."

Allan and Maithcle went into the sitting-room and Maithcle seated herself at the piano, running her fingers over the keys.

"I'm not familiar with this instrument," she said.

He made no comment, and, after singing one verse of a light ballad, she faced Allan apologetically.

"I did not think you would return."

"Couldn't stay away from you."

"Give us 'Annie Laurie,'" came from without.

While she sang Allan tried to formulate a plan of action, and finally arrived at a certain conclusion.

"Annie Laurie" was followed by applause; then Allan asked for his favorite.

It was sweet to do his bidding. She sang with all the pathos of her rich voice a simple, tender ballad. And as the words swelled out:

"I did not know that we should part,
Dear heart, dear heart."

He bent forward whispering:

"But we must." He wheeled the piano stool which brought her face near his own.

"I lose my reason, Maithcle," he cried softly, "sweet as you are in the bridal robe."

She trembled, feeling his warm breath, and doubt sped, but only for a moment; it returned presently, and with it the agonizing sense of loss. Yet in the happy moment

she felt, realized, that she was beloved, tenderly, wholly, even as she loved.

Her trembling hand touched the music-rack; two selections tumbled to the floor. Allan gathered them up, his eyes falling upon the title of one, "Vikings." He smiled.

"How different it might have been," he said, "if we had lived in the days of Vikings; I would have stolen you, I would have carried you off." His voice filled with passionate earnestness.

"Oh, how beautiful life might have been, sailing the high seas with you."

A troubled look came into her eyes.

"I would not have touched a hair of your dear head if—if—you did not care to—to be my bride; if your heart had not a greatness of love for me, I would have given you your freedom, I would have carried you back to your own people—sweet—sweet and pure. I would have left you forever."

He was holding her hands.

"I wish Vikings lived in these days," she cried, her eyes passing him; he saw the light! But in a moment it was lost in unmistakable sadness.

The cuckoo called the hour, and the next instant Scott's head appeared at the open door.

"H'm—h'm," shuffling his feet.

"You might blame me, Dick, if that train gits away without you."

The head disappeared, and instantly Allan was upon his feet.

"Maithale!"

His arms extended passionately, then dropped to his sides limp.

She was standing, waiting the sentence that required all his self-mastery.

He came near—one step, his hands now safe behind his back, his head bowed.

“It is true—I am engaged—forgive!”

Her eyes were cast down as he proceeded:

“Never doubt that I was—am sincere. I love you—dear”—his voice dropped to a whisper—“I have always loved you, always.”

She gave no sign.

“Good-by,” he murmured.

Still no word.

“Good-by, dear, dear,” he repeated. “I owe you an explanation; I will see you soon; you will understand.”

The eyes opened, looking full into his own.

“Pardon, you owe me nothing. I hold you in no way. I—I am to blame for a little foolishness. I—I was merely rehearsing a part.”

“Maithale! you do not understand.”

Scott’s voice came from the open door:

“Dick, you ain’t got more’n twenty minutes to git thet train.”

“Won’t you tell me good-by?” he cried pleadingly.

She turned to the piano. Scott was waiting.

“Good-by,” she half spoke, feebly striking a minor chord.

He turned away, and she heard his steps as he hurried down the hall. And then the neigh of a horse; the bark of a dog; the crack of a whip.

Things went black! Her head dropped lightly into her hands and darkness lifted to show the opening deeps.

“Oh, Dorothy, Dorothy,” she cried, “why, oh, why did you deceive me!”

And when she lifted her head, Mrs. Scott was turning down the lamps.

"Go straight to your room," said the dear soul; "you hev' bin jest pestered out."

"Oh, no," she spoke with averted face, "but if you don't mind, I am a bit weary."

She went up the steps slowly, trailing the bridal robe, and Mrs. Scott's loving gaze followed to the landing.

"Precious lamb! She has quarreled weth him; thet's the way I used to treat Si, only Si took it from the roadside."

CHAPTER X.

THE BONFIRE.

So absorbed was Maithale in her own thoughts that she failed to perceive the attention lavished upon her by Dorothy, whose sympathetic nature, detecting the other's troubled countenance, longed to comfort.

Dorothy did not wholly understand Maithale's depression.

They were on the hay-wagon, and, after a lull in the conversation that had been fairly bright, Maithale ventured:

"Would you marry a man you didn't love?"

"Not I!"

"But if you knew the one man you did love was engaged to the dearest, sweetest friend you ever had on earth, what would you do?"

"Oh, dearie, give me something easy!"

"Please!"

"Well, really, Maithale, if the man I loved had promised himself to another——" she paused, connecting sentences meditatively, "before I came into his life, I think I might die an old maid. But if he loved the other girl, and had merely flirted with me, I think—oh, I think a dozen things. I could hate him for one. He wouldn't be worth pique. You know a case?" A pink flame touched her face. Jealousy is the *ignis fatuus* of the brain! "And the man?" she went on.

"I can only tell you this—he is the dearest fellow, the very soul of honor."

"Loving two girls at the same time?"

Maithale winced; she continued, however, apologetically, for there is ever a plausible excuse for the man the woman loves, even for his most deplorable acts:

"I do not know the whole story."

"Describe him."

Maithale began the arduous task, with eyes drifting to the far-away.

"A perfect description of Ned," thought Dorothy, listening and recalling something Ned had said complimentary to Maithale. Besides, Ned had not written as he promised and many days had passed. She reflected; if Ned was flirting? Well, revenge is sweet! "Intolerable!" she murmured to herself at the moment, but later, as she put two and two together, she fancied she had some cause, and accordingly arranged to persecute the man she loved.

And Maithale, fancying that she had described Allan too accurately, was giving the conversation a turn, as Pat, who had been raking near-by, called out:

"Ye come down off that wagon right off. Ye be the most thrying gals I ever seen; I wondther what ye'll be doin' next. There's people up at the house, an' ye pa's waving his handkerchy at ye. Come right down now."

Dorothy slipped down easily. Maithale jumped when half way.

"Now, the loike of that!" exclaimed Pat. "Better engage a doctor an' have him round handy, instead of so many beaux. For it's broken heads or legs ye're goin' to hav' some of these days."

Maithale laughed aloud, but Dorothy did not even deign to hear.

The same evening Dorothy sent a line to Richard Allan, which somewhat surprised the gentleman. The



"YE BE THE MOST THRYING GAIS I EVER SEEN."

note stated that she had a crow or some such bird to pick with him. He obeyed the summons reluctantly.

He fancied that Dorothy entertained suspicion of his conduct and that she meant to bring him to task.

Man is prone to make superior claim where woman has acknowledged the highest compliment, and he constitutes himself high priest ever after, notwithstanding that his conduct often places him rather ambiguously for the position.

Allan was not in a fine humor when Miss Dorothy Dale's note arrived. Two nights previous to its arrival, Clara Lansing had quarreled with him, but the quarrel was not one of which he could take advantage, being brought about by himself. The gentleman at all times, he wrote a note of apology to the lady and with Dorothy's invitation came her ladylike pardon. Thus he had made little progress toward alienating the lady's affections. He resolved with feelings rather *désolé* to make explanations to Maithele, to justify himself, and yet, he argued, what might be the justification? His opinion of Clara Lansing had changed materially; she evidently meant to pass indifference and to pay little heed to slight provocations. Gentlemanly etiquette forbade decided methods.

But fate was against him, and the early part of the evening brought only chagrin. Dorothy had taken complete possession of him for the evening, which in no instance could be annoying, as Dorothy was a delightful and companionable girl. But he longed to be near Maithele on this bonfire occasion.

The bonfire, when the weather permitted, was a feature of the evening, but the present bonfire Dorothy made an occasion. It had its special place marked in the day by dead ashes heaped in a worn circle to the right of Ham-

mock Court. Often a gypsy kettle swung on the crane, emitting savory odors.

Scott had just thrown a great log into the blaze, and, with the crackle, as of giant teeth crunching, a red tongue shot into the air, licking with relish the crisp green leaves.

The bullpup snarled in a dream under the bench, and Tim Shinn within close range of the blaze opened one eye as Scott seated himself again. But Scott was a man of weight, the bench upset and the bullpup awakening, scrambled tragically from under it with a terrified howl which brought Tim Shinn to his feet.

"Ha—ha—ha" laughed Scott, "scairt to death, drempt I left him."

The dog cuddled up to Scott, who patted him on the head.

"A dumb brute can't talk at you nor back of you, an' I like the solemn intel'gence of a dog. I don't go where they don't like dogs—church, for example. Dogs an' ministers don't gee. Did you ever notice? It's some different at Forty-Fort Church, your dog can slip in there an' welcome. I had Tim Shinn in a church weth me onct, he was all right tell sermon time; when the minister got riled up, thet dog got riled up. I give him a nudge, but he didn't pay no attention; presently the reverend gentleman put his first down hard on the rim of the pulpit, an' he yells out sudden: 'What in conscience,' said he, 'is the matter weth thet dog?' 'Oh,' said I—' I hed to say suthin', everybody was looking my way and a feller that I fairly hated was grinning—'Oh, nothin',' I sent back. 'Them's only his cuss words; guess he be riled over the sermon.' Wa'al thet feller jest roared, an' the reverend gentleman allowed him or thet dog hed to quit. We turned out 'n favor of the preacher,

an' we ain't bin together in church sence." Dale laughed heartily, patting the bullpup's head.

Warm rugs covered the benches and Aunt Helen drew a brown skin about her limbs. A fancy red hood was upon her head and she looked like a big papoose, save that her arms were not strapped; they contained a wonderful yellow and black striped creature, known on the island as Miss Jack Tiger. Miss Tiger was not afraid of Scott's dogs, she simply despised them; but Aunt Helen was watchful, and when Miss Jack appeared at gatherings she was generally protected by Aunt Helen's strong arm.

Mathele did not wonder at Dorothy's unusual warm greeting, charming manner, and welcome extended Richard Allan, but she did take herself into account, condemning her own conduct.

The analysis of her heart was severe; and days before the bonfire, she decided that Mr. Richard Allan should find no opportunity for further explanation. But the bravery planned in the quiet hour, when the excuse for bravery is lacking, is like temptation nicely put aside when the occasion is wanting.

She greeted Allan pleasantly, coldly, he thought, then gave her attention to the other guests.

Listening to her happy laugh, no one, not Allan, realized the anguish that she suffered. Yet strength of heart is not gained in a day, and pride, the great assistant, often enough, must be whipped along.

Every bonfire was an entertainment with Silas Scott. He made the entertainment; the sibilant tongue of the blaze inspiring his best thought. The few whose good fortune it was to meet with him about the blaze rarely, if ever, forgot his wonderful personality, or the genial humor that made his anecdote the one worth remember-

ing. Everybody had a story, even dignified Aunt Helen, who regaled the guests with touches of early youth.

At the moment Mr. Dale was harping on strikes, Scott taunting ingloriously.

"You ain't hed nuthing stole sense morning?"

"No."

"Then don't be squimmidging. Mebbe you art to hev' hed."

Constant raids on the island, though small offences, such as digging hills of potatoes and other delectable vines, were not so very serious, yet every misdemeanor of the kind worried Mr. Dale.

Dorothy tactfully led the conversation into happier channels. Politics, business talk, strikes, were eliminated.

And Scott caught the cue, engaging the attention of all.

"If you want sport jest get Louisa talking about Injuns. It ain't the actual facts as she seen 'm, but as her dad seen 'm. Give me Louisa every time imagination is needed."

Dorothy laughed.

"Yes, turn to Louisa for fun, daughter. Louisa has a repitation for op'ning pufformances. She has a story about her Cousin Polly——"

"Don't tetch on pussonals, Si," cried Mrs. Scott.

"Sho! Ye don't call Jerry and Polly pussonals."

"They be part of the family."

Scott's eyes twinkled with the genuine merriment of the born narrator, and Mrs. Scott whispered to Aunt Helen:

"No use my telling the story, he would be correcting all the time. Might as well let him hev' the pleasure anyway."

"Louisa can tell the story, but she's shyer'n her Aunt

Polly's fust husband," spoke Scott in a big voice. Attention followed. The story of Aunt Polly's first husband promised to be interesting.

Ruford and Lawrence threw on a big log. Crick, crack, crack! The red tongue shot upward, consuming the green leaf bough ravenously; the two young men retired to their places and Scott began:

"Aunt Polly was dead set on Jerry; she was a Catholic an' he was a Protestant; I alwus thought thet was the bone of contention between 'm. Jerry was alwus hanging around Polly, and Polly was the kind thet wanted to git married. She hedn't the looks thet makes fellers stand round an' wait their turn, but she hed some of the woman suffrage quality in her make-up. So it was fixed between 'm to git married. An' Polly come the evening before the send-off to invite me an' Louisa. Wa'al, she talked an' talked, presently dropping a few remarks thet looked uncertain, an' I felt a sort of dampness in the air. She went off before dark an' me an' Louisa set an' talked about the coming event, both of us feeling things wa'n't exactly right. Wa'al, anyway, next day, me an' Louisa dressed an' set out for the wedding.

"The church was right down there in Pittston an' run by a mighty good little German priest. Wa'al, when we got there me an' Louisa was the only envited. Heving said 'Howdy!' to Jerry an' Polly, who hed rode up in a hired rig, right fancy-looking as a woman might pick out, an' was hetching as we come along, we walked enside an' took our seats in the front pew. The priest come out; then up the aisle comes Polly. She stood stalk still before him a minute.

" 'Vel,' he says, 'vere your man?'

"Polly looked red in the face an' Louisa nudged me an' begin to fan herself, though the day wa'n't hot.

" 'I can't marry ye' vomans, unless ye hev a man partner!' said the priest.

" 'He's outside,' said Polly, 'if you wait a minute.'

" 'Oh, I can wait.'

"Polly went down the aisle an' presently came up weth the groom, carrying him—yes'm, carrying him up the aisle."

At this unexpected part of the story, Dorothy screamed, and somebody cried:

"Sh—sh——"

"Yes, daughter," continued Scott, knocking the ashes from his cigar, then taking two or three puffs at the weed, "she carried him up bodily an' set him down careful. Wa'al, the good little priest shook his head, but, 'Vel, vel,' was all he said. I would hev busted a suspender if it hedn't bin for Louisa, who seemed about ready to faint."

Scott paused, allowing his audience pleasurable anticipation.

"And they were married?" inquired Mr. Dale.

"Oh, thet was jest the beginning. The priest hed to know their religion an' the man admitted meekly thet he was a Protestant.

" 'No, you ain't,' snapped Polly. 'I baptized you last night in my own parlor. Did you suppose Jeremiah Hodkins, thet I would unite myself weth a heathen?' 'Vel, vel, vel,' said the priest, beginning the ceremony."

Maithale was nearly choking with the ludicrousness of the situation, but she held her handkerchief to her mouth.

Scott concluded with another vigorous pull at the weed:

"Jerry never did seem to git his nerve back. He died the following year, an' Timothy, his only living brother, set up to the widow."

"Now, Mr. Scott," put in Aunt Helen, dubiously.

"It's a fact, Louisa is the living witness. They was married in the same church by the same priest—the only difference being that the second marriage was witnessed by a lot of city folks. Tim hed learnt from Jerry's experience an' was baptized reguler the day before the ceremony, an' I'll eat my hat if he wa'n't ahead of the bride, standing at the rail waiting for her to come up."

"Cousin Polly's ears ought to be burning," said Mrs. Scott, as the young men plied Scott with questions, but Scott could not be made to deviate in the least from the original story, declaring that he had retailed the facts substantially as they were.

"Well, it's a good one," said Mr. Dale; "your turn, Allan,"

But Allan passed the compliment to Ned.

"Really," said Lawrence, "I haven't the nerve to fall in line with Scott, but I did have an experience the other day."

Ned's story proceeded:

"A fellow came to my office; he was rather a dapper chap, and explained that he wanted to have me draw up his will. He had a premonition, he said, of an untimely call. I told him that I had very little experience in such matters, but that my secretary would introduce him to a lawyer on the next floor, who would attend to the matter for him.

"'But, Mr. Lawrence,' he expostulated, 'had I wanted a lawyer I would have gone to one. I am not a stranger in the city.' He fumbled about in his pocket for something that was not there; and I meanwhile studied his

physiognomy and was rather shaken to discover that my visitor was a lunatic——”

“Horrible!” cried Dorothy, off guard. “What did you do, and how could you tell?”

“Don’t push him over the brink, daughter,” exclaimed Scott, nettled at the interruption, “he had only come to *discover*——”

“Yes,” continued Lawrence, “to discover that he had me in his power, for as I rose from the desk, telling him that I would return in a moment, he took me rudely by the arm. ‘Sit down!’ he hissed from between his teeth, and before I knew what he was about, a pistol was pointed at my head.”

“Mercy!” cried Mrs. Scott and Aunt Helen in chorus.

“Well, you may be sure I was quiet enough; the will was drawn up, which was most absurd. He bequeathed all his property to his fiancée, with a proviso; she was to take up her abode in a lunatic asylum.”

Some one asked:

“But how did you get rid of the fellow?”

“Just before the last line was scratched, my secretary opened the door directly back of the lunatic. I wrote on a slip of paper: ‘Lunatic, quick, help!’ I managed to pass the slip to him. He read and acted promptly; and a few moments later, my fellow wore manacles.”

“Whew!” exclaimed Scott.

“A nightly story,” sighed Dorothy.

“Why nightly?” asked Lawrence.

“She means grewsome,” assisted Maithale.

“Thanks awfully,” said Dorothy, smiling archly. “So good of you, Maithale; I didn’t like to explain to Mr. Lawrence that I seldom mean what I say.”

And Lawrence, all attention, mentally calculated the leagues to a woman’s heart.

"Talking about wills reminds me."

"Hold on a minute, Silas," said Mr. Dale, "here comes Ben. I am sure he has an appetizer. He will not interrupt if a story is on."

Ben rested the large silver tray upon a small table in readiness to receive it, and was followed in short order by two maids, dainty in 'my lady's maid' livery, who passed the Roman punch and dainty salad.

When the collation was served Dale called to Scott:

"We are ready, Silas, for that story,"

"Oh, it ain't a story, jest a phase of valley life."

"Let's have it."

The story was unusually good and at its close Ben came forth with a waiter of beautiful white popcorn, and the fun went round.

Allan smiled upon Maithale. How sweet it was to feast his eyes upon her lovely face and hear the joy of her low laughter! Yet, marking the pensiveness of the eyes, he missed the light that had passed.

Pride was sustaining her.

He might have crossed over and seated himself beside her, as Lawrence had vacated the place to help Scott with the big log, but just as his intention was putting into effect, a bit of popcorn hit him on the head, and, turning in the direction whence it came, Dorothy Dale was smiling guiltily.

Dorothy rightly fancied that Lawrence was longing for the seat beside herself, so Allan was immediately invited. Lawrence was having hard lines. He could not imagine how he had fallen in his lady's estimation, and he might have hated poor Maithale if at the moment he had known that she was the innocuous cause.

The big log glowed with pictures in red, and Mrs. Scott, drawing the shawl about her shoulders, said some-

thing pretty about the moon, which just then was coming up from behind the Ledge, throwing a mystic loveliness over hill and vale.

Ben brought the barrel, and, with the assistance of Scott and Ruford placed it in the center of the fire.

The three men stood back from the blaze. The barrel was to end the entertainment.

It was a large, fine barrel stuffed with damp hay.

Greedily the ravenous flame shot upward; it caught in an instant, but the damp hay tightly packed within did not ignite at once.

Maithele's face illumined with mental radiance, watching the white and black smoke curl round and round the staves, with intelligent pursuit that suggested weird and fantastic pictures of the fabulous.

"Look!" she cried, the wonderful voice mellowing the hush that fell upon the spectators.

"The white and the black clouds are the Jinn. See how they pursue one another! There! The Evil One is in the lead, he is going to annihilate the good Jinnee. Oh, Mr. Scott, of what does that great ball of fire remind you?"

"Pass on to Dick, daughter; it ain't anything but blaze to me."

Richard Allan said something, but no one heard; all were intently following Maithele.

It was a wonderful picture—the white and black smoke-clouds whirling about the barrel, ready to burst.

Presently the white cloud, designated as the good Jinn, vanquished the black cloud, and the barrel trembled, as from beneath it a great writhing thing grew furiously voracious. Aunt Helen caught the enthusiasm of her imaginative charge, as the straw ignited, and the monster's tongue shot up many feet.

"Pandora's Box, she cried, "for which the Jinn were contending, and the good spirit has won, my child; he always does." And while she spoke, a grating sound was distinctly heard, like the turning of a key in a rusty lock.

"See, the box opens," whispered the Southern girl, as the creaking ceased.

"Amen!" sighed the man who loved her, "then Hope remains."

But Dorothy was not to be outdone. Scott was giving the barrel a slight push with a long stick.

"Pandora's Box! Bah! Where are your eyes, people? It is the Juggernaut car destroyed by an American."

"Bravo!" Lawrence ventured, trying to find her eyes, but they were fastened upon Scott, who said with complaisance:

"It's the finest part of the ent'tainment. Jest all keep your eyes on that barrel." And as they gazed in wonder and fascination, it parted.

Long iridescent ribbons bolted high, revealing a greenish marvel in frosty shimmering gold, that lived but a few glorious moments, like the dreamer's chateau En Espagne, falling with a soft whirr, a handful of jewels, on the picture log!

Everybody clapped.

Mr. and Mrs. Scott made ready to depart, but the bullpup would not be aroused, and the master apologized for his behavior:

"When you got a kid dog on your hands, you got to humor it or drown it, one."

Dale laughed, resting his hand on Scott's shoulder, his thoughts quickly diverted from dogs, romance and picturesque blazes to business.

"You think Scott, that attorney in Wilkes-Barre——"

"Hes sense Yes, he hes some; but you better hear one on him," pointing in Allan's direction, before you go ahead."

And he lifted his voice.

"Dick!"

But Allan had just reached Maithele's side, and the world was lost. Scott smiled approvingly, throwing a half finished cigar into the bushes.

"Thet's a case of spoons," he remarked, with a wink that Mr. Dale did not comprehend.

"The worse I ever see," he repeated, "but thet feller, can beat the Wilkes-Barre feller in the fust round. I'll tell you one on him:

"Last summer a neighbor of mine kilt eight or ten hogs, and a few days later claimed that one is missing and accused one of the neighbors thet helped weth the kelling of stealing it.

"It was a black'n white hog. The accused man come to me, an' I says, 'Git Dick Allan to defend you.' So he took my advice. The prosecutor got the Wilkes-Barre attorney mentioned.

"The day for the trial came off, which was put down for 2 o'clock. Dick saw the prosecuting attorney going into a eating-house at about noon, and so Allan happened in the same eating-house about a minute later.

"They shuck hands an' swore they was friends—honest an' true an' thet the case shouldn't be no bar to good feelings. The drinks was set up. Dick went even so far as to pay for same.

"I can't tell you how Dick done it, but he managed to slip into the attorney's overcoat pocket some hair of a black an' white hog he had procured the day before. Wa'al, sir, they parted friends an' half hour later appeared in the court-room as enemies. The feller from

Wilkes-Barre made an eloquent plea, an' rested. An' more'n me in thet court-room considered Dick's goose about cooked. Then Allan got up. Ye mine, he don't hev' time for small talk, but he's alwus fair an' squar' to his party when he takes holt.

"He expressed his regret at the affair, said he believed the hull thing a mistake, thet no hog was stolen, but had been et; thet he hedn't a doubt thet the able attorney hed et some of the pork himself, an' was almost ready to venture thet he hed some of thet hog hair in his overcoat pocket. Whereupon the Wilkes-Barre attorney got excited an' said it wa'n't so. An' he went further: 'Feel in my pockets if thet's so!' he cried. A witness standing handy jerked the coat off the peg.

"Wa'al, sir, thet witness brought up the black'n white hog hair in the presence of the court. The meeting broke up, an' thet feller"—pointing to Allan—"went ahead!"

No one heard this story but Mr. Dale, which was fortunate, as the beau-ideal of a young girl seldom figures in substantial affairs of off-color.

"Git in, git in," said Scott, as Ben brought the rig around. "I guess," addressing Allan, "you wouldn't mine bonfires for eternity, but 'taint polite to stay to morning to watch 'm out."

The insinuation touched.

Maithele and Allan had only spoken a few words together. Dorothy came up as Scott was telling the court-room story to Mr. Dale—Dorothy, who had grown suddenly attached to Allan. Allan jumped into the trap and took the lines, Mrs. Scott and Ruford and the two dogs on the back seat. Scott waved his hat:

"I'm sorry for the manners of the bullpup; he'll be for sale to-morrow."

CHAPTER XI.

THE AFFAIR IN BACHELOR QUARTERS.

THE two weeks that followed found the island people entertaining.

The days were warm, delightful; and on the 12th, Aunt Helen's birthday, a 4 o'clock luncheon was served in Hammock Court.

Dorothy announced to Maithale at breakfast:

"Ned Lawrence will be up for the evening and possibly you will be interested to know that Richard Allan will be up also. I have a letter from him this morning—oh, yes, he begs to be remembered." And, as an after thought she remarked, lightly:

"Richard is such a dear!"

Maithale experienced a shock, but she made no comment. Her nerves, however, suffered through the day, a bit of antique china slipping from her fingers at luncheon.

"Accidents will happen," said Aunt Helen, smiling, and Ben, picking up the fragments, remarked:

"It's a sure sign, Miss Maithale, you going to see your beau t'night."

Dorothy clapped her hands.

"Hear, hear."

But Maithale's heart was heavy. She did not understand Dorothy's hilarious spirits and readily convinced herself that Dorothy was perhaps developing into a flirt.

The admiration of Ned Lawrence for Dorothy Dale was very apparent. Was Dorothy leading him on for the fun of it? Dorothy was engaged to Richard Allan. Maithale had worked the problem out to her own satisfaction. The thing that troubled her most was Allan himself. She knew that his declaration for herself had not been, under the circumstances, fair, yet she was glad, with that gladness that comes of confident assurance of love reciprocated.

Once it dawned upon her that his fiancée might be some other girl. How the thought fired her brain! She dismissed the thought, and again she recalled how emphatically he had made it apparent that Dorothy and herself were the only girls for whom he evinced favor.

He had been to Lechaw-Hanna twice since the bonfire; she had seen him once, only for a few moments, having an engagement with Ruford. When he called again she was spending the day with Mrs. Scott.

Maithale fancied, hoped, she had proven herself sufficiently strong. She might have despised herself for the smallest exhibition of grief. Haughtiness, she held as a cloak, a mask, which deceives no one but the wearer. Flirtation would certainly have been an evidence of pique. Her position was difficult.

After luncheon Mr. Dale, Lawrence and Allan rowed the party in small boats to Falling Springs. The boats returned before dusk and bright faces and much laughter proclaimed Aunt Helen's birthday a success.

Lawrence and the others had gone up to the house. Allan loitered on the bank, amusing himself with pebbles which he hurled with malicious delight into the river, enjoying the sport.

Dorothy, who had come down the bank to welcome the boats, abstractedly followed his play before returning up

the path, but he caught sight of her and called out, hurrying to her side:

"You are always evading me, Dorothy!" And when he reached her side he spoke audibly: "Did you not write that you would be very glad if I came up this evening?"

Maithele, an unwilling witness, felt no surprise in Dorothy's response; it was the acknowledgment!

"Aren't you clever? Evading, indeed! Have I not watched your eyes chasing Maithele, even while I stood at your elbow——"

Enough! She could not avoid this much, and suddenly it dawned upon her that Dorothy knew she was near. Just a moment before she had been singing—coming down the path. She stepped into the shrubbery as Allan came forward, intending to retrace her steps, for indeed, she did not know that he was still on the bank. She hurried away by the narrow path leading to the rear of the house, entered the kitchen door, and flew up the back stairway to her room.

Had she remained another moment she would have heard that which would have saved her the sorrows that followed.

Allan did not tell Dorothy of his engagement to Clara Lansing, but he spoke in terms so glowing of Maithele that Dorothy felt guilty for having detained him so constantly. Of course it all flashed upon her now that poor Lawrence had never been over-attentive to Maithele, that it was jealousy on her part to imagine that Maithele referred to him.

Allan watched for Maithele as the shadows deepened; but a neuralgic headache proved the good excuse, so he determined at once to monopolize Dorothy, who did not discourage him; on the contrary, she smiled upon him

when Lawrence was in sight, and seemed thoroughly content with his companionship.

Allan was extremely entertaining. He was not the jolly sort like Lawrence, nor had he any of the accomplishments that made Lawrence the greatly-sought.

Lawrence had talents fetching with the set, that makes the evanescence of society. He was proficient with banjo and guitar, and possessed besides, a fine tenor voice; he likewise excelled in athletics, and was accredited at his club a champion of golf and a prize winner as well.

Allan possessed none of these accomplishments.

He was a practical, forceful man of affairs; poetic within his deeper self and wonderfully endowed with that marvelous puissant quality, personal magnetism. It was this force that created the potent influence, the intense expression, that made his personality, so irresistible in court-room syllogism, drawing-room eloquence, or veranda persiflage. And the deep, poetic undercurrent in his speech, gliding often into delightful metaphor, produced a fascination difficult to withstand.

"Tower of strength," he said to a woman one day, who, hanging upon his verdict, unburdened her soul, deservedly meriting scorn. She left his presence, hurrying home through the pelting rain with uplifted heart and a purpose of amendment, braver, better, to the end of her days.

Few, however, were acquainted with the poetic side of his nature. He had learned in that school of human opinions to guard sentiment as a thing apart.

Clara Lansing had been drawn to him; he was the magnet, yet, she charged him with a lack of "feeling," which proof divorced her by the natural law.

Dorothy, a wholesome, intelligent young woman, naturally found entertainment in the society of Richard

Allan. But on this particular evening her charming attentiveness meant annoyance to the other individual.

If her conscience smote her—listening to Allan's eulogies on Maithela—she quieted conscience with the beneficent pat that the future happiness of Mr. Ned Lawrence might be inestimably benefited by the lesson, and she excused her own conduct with the apology that owing to the neuralgic headache, the desired companion was not available.

When Mr. Dale had finished the game with Lawrence and discussed mines and miners to a finish, he retired, and Lawrence, finding himself alone, possessed himself of a guitar which he discovered in the music-room, seating himself at the far end of the veranda.

Allan at once noticed Dorothy's inattention, when a few moments before she had seemed interested enough in the yarn he was spinning. He got upon his feet, with a frivolous remark intended for the ear of Lawrence, who came forward softly singing the refrain of an old-time ballad.

"At last," sighed Lawrence, watching the vanishing rival. One or two flourishes and the strumming ceased. Standing the guitar against the veranda post, he dropped restfully into the deep-cushioned seat just vacated.

"That fellow," with a nod in the direction of the retreating figure, "hasn't the sense——"

"Pardon," she corrected; "it is sense always that holds me."

She lifted her fan, seemingly to hide the yawn; closed it again.

The hot blood rushed to Ned's brow, and he looked upon her darkly.

"What have you been doing with yourself all evening?" she smiled.

He did not respond.

"Awfully late, is it not?"

"I will not detain you," he said sharply, getting upon his feet.

"Considerate of you!"

He followed inside, fury, indignation, possessing him.

She waited at the foot of the stairs, and he came into the reception hall again.

"Good night," he said; "I am going over to the Quarters."

"So soon?"

He was silent, and she ventured, with a smile he was too angry to see:

"I suppose you merely came inside to put the guitar in its place. Awfully nice of you."

Her hand rested upon the balustrade and he put his own upon it a trifle roughly. Gentleness might have won. Had he taken the hand as was his wont, he might have discovered the wonderful way to a woman's heart; but the rude detention declared proprietary rights, which produced instant hauteur.

"I will not detain you——" he began.

"Which remark you made an hour ago."

Her head was high.

"See here, Dorothy, you are treating me——"

He got no further.

The door opened at the rear of the hall and the flash of a lantern arrested their attention; shuffling feet came down the hall.

Ben halted, observing the two. Ben might have retired immediately by the same door, but Dorothy's voice made duty clear.

"Ben, I was about to ring for you." And to Lawrence:

"Good-night; I trust that you find Ben attentive—he is waiting now to escort you across the lawn."

With old-time ideas of the server's etiquette, Ben swung his lantern back and forth as he passed into the night, and a few seconds later Lawrence brushed him aside as, with long, swinging stride, he gained Bachelor Quarters.

Lawrence found Allan toasting his feet at a small wood fire.

The cabin consisted of four rooms—two above and two below—no hall between, but the room that Allan occupied, possibly because of dainty things hung upon the walls and arranged in odd ways claimed the distinction of—"the den."

From this room, the funny little stairway leading to the upper rooms added picturesque charm. Besides the lounge stacked with pillows, and the curtained triangle behind which was the toilet table, the room contained a melodeon, and a table littered with magazines and papers.

Above the desk on a Dutch rack, a few choice volumes. It was a cozy cabin in which the men delighted and the women made delightful when the men were away. Somehow the room had always fallen to Allan, and he lounged in it contentedly, notwithstanding that it was necessarily a sort of passageway—as the two rooms above could be gained only by passing through it. Lawrence might have reached his room by the rear door, but habit led him to the door of the den.

"You're in luck," spoke Allan, meaning anything.

"I think you tried yours before I came," was the sullen response.

Lawrence was stalking through, evidently bent on gaining his own room.

"Indeed; and your informant?"

The introductory remark checked his retreat.

Lawrence was quite distraught with Dorothy's behavior and Allan's question had a disagreeable effect.

"Not Silas Scott," was the chance retort that sent a bullet in the opposite direction.

Big, honest, Silas Scott had patted Allan on the back that very evening, insinuating:

"If it ain't Maithale it must be Dorothy," and chuckling, "you be dividin' attentions."

As Allan recalled the speech, Lawrence faltered, his hand upon the latch of the adjoining room, something stirring his thoughts. He resolved to probe.

Was the usurper appropriating the inalienable possession?

Pushing a chair over to the table, he fairly threw himself into it, deluded with the idea that Allan was smitten with Dorothy. And so, the complication which started upon a hay wagon brought about the entanglement and development.

Cognizant of the near approach of Allan's marriage, he resented the interference; thus, it became incumbent upon himself to bring Mr. Richard Allan to a sense of his obligation, while, through that mist whose common appellation is infatuation, and wherein the smooth road becomes the dark, tangled way, Allan in turn imagined that every man who fixed his eyes upon Maithale became forever after her willing slave. Yet, he was not jealous of Lawrence; he had no real cause; he was merely irritated, having failed to deliver the explanation due Maithale—which brought him to the island.

Ben, who had entered the cabin almost upon Ned's footsteps, emerged from the rear room. Turning up the

wick of Allan's lamp, he mumbled something about the chilliness of nights in "Penns'vanie."

"Why don't you go back to the South where the nights are warm?" growled Lawrence, irritated with the world at large.

The lamp fluttered and Ben's attention was for a moment diverted.

"I ain't bossed by nobody 'cept Miss Maithele; she's the only female 'cept the Angel Gabriel——"

"Gabriel is not a woman, Ben," cut in Allan gently.

"Who say so? Ain't I seen the Lord's trump'ter in pictu'es? Ain't I seen her flying through the air with that trumpet and her golden hair flowing and her spangly tawlton skirt a-trailing?"

Allan smiled; the other was in a mood; and the pause that followed was broken by the fall of something heavy upon the floor.

"Well, how come I can't walk acrost a room without running agin things?"

It is not fair to accuse Ben of intentional clumsiness; the swords, relics of that great family squabble—four decades passed, had been rather well secured. They fell from the wall all the same, and Ben laid them carefully upon the table.

"Don't like to fool weth these here things," he said; "seen too many white gentl'men kilt with 'm down in Kentuck. Inordinate hankering for one and the same lady by two or more gentl'men an' these things get a polish."

"I thought it was the bowie-knife or the pistol down there?" said Lawrence.

But Ben missed the scurrilous charge, turning hastily to the door, and, before the next word was spoken, the sound of his retreating steps died upon the night.

Handling one of the swords, a critical eye upon the keen edge, Allan spoke:

"Girls use these toys now-a-days——"

"Because men lack courage," was the frosty comment.

Testing the steel, Allan ventured, quietly:

"Men lack courage? Would you like to test mine?"

There was no anger in the challenge, only the desire for sport, but Lawrence misinterpreted the light in Allan's eyes and answered laconically:

"In the South—before the war—and even to-day, in some parts of Europe, that sort of thing is the defence of honor. In this part of the country it has been, and is, the instrument of crime."

Allan stared coldly, his eyes taking on a steel-gray expression; a sort of cynicism dropped about the corners of the mouth. The influence of a warmer clime was upon him—the girl he loved was not far away.

"A moment ago you declared that girls use these toys because men lack courage, and now the defence is the charge of crime; you must have had my lady's mitten for a sweet good-night."

"Your lady's mitten?"

The gauntlet fell at Allan's feet, yet, it was an inoffensive magazine that chanced too near his hand that sped across the room.

"Your lady's mitten, indeed," emphasizing. "Ha, ha, I hardly need the sword to test your honor; you—you—haven't any."

One is not prepared for the sudden thunderclap out of a clear sky; but the crash had hardly died upon Allan's ear before he was upon his feet.

"Take that back," he said, in the unmistakable tone.

But instead, Lawrence repeated, force and menace marking each word.

"Honor! I reiterate sir, you haven't any."

They were facing as they spoke, and Allan's hand was fastened upon the sword. There was no misconstruing, the aspersion was direct.

"Take that back," he cried in a low, thrilling voice; "take that back, or—I might forget and run you through."

Lawrence laid upon the other weapon, testing its strength.

Allan had not moved a muscle, but his chest, slightly heaving, gave evidence of tumult within. Tall, erect, cold, he faced his opponent, one hand forcefully behind his back, the other clinching the weapon.

"Not here, we might go over to the Ledge," said Allan. "We are guests in this house."

There is no point of attack so keen as that which flaunts admonishment.

Lawrence walked over to the window.

"Where is that black idiot?" he blurted forth, looking into the night. "We shall need a lantern."

"No great hurry. In an hour the moon will be up and——"

"You would request her father as a second."

"Her father? If you mean his spirit, I would prefer some one more tangible. Miss Burton's father is dead."

"Who in the devil is talking about Miss Burton?"

"She seems to be the point of honor?"

Lawrence had thrown himself into a chair, his eyes sullenly bent upon the floor, but now he lifted his head and stared at Allan. And while he stared a swift illumination dispersed the ugly cloud that hung in his vision, not one day, but since the night of the bonfire. The truth dawned upon him so suddenly that he fell all in a

heap, and in the joy of discovery he forgot the point of honor.

Allan returned the stare with more kindness than Lawrence deserved.

"Well, it is too rich!" Lawrence laughed, but laughter jarred in the room. Allan's brow clouded. Merriment is not always convincing.

"You—you didn't think I—? No, Allan, I never have given Miss Burton a thought."

Allan placed the sword upon the table.

"Shucks" was the sententious comment of Ben, as he dropped heavily from the low veranda, "Yanks ain't w'oth powder an' shot for fencing. They had a cause, but I guess it didn't hold with the arg'ment."

Ben had viewed the scene in the lighted room through the open window. As he disappeared into the night, Lawrence, who had begun pacing the room, extended his hand to Allan.

"Forgive me—Dick, I was hasty."

"Rather," said Allan, his voice calm and even, "Love that is pure is always honorable. Your attitude a moment ago was unpardonable. Admit jealousy, and you are forgiven."

A smile flitted across his face; a soft light came into his eyes; he continued:

"Notwithstanding that I am engaged to Clara Lansing," hesitatingly, "I"—holding his head with a proud, truthful defiance, "I love, worship Maithale Burton." Lawrence withdrew his hand.

"And you consider yourself honorable?"

"Hold—the explanation——"

But Lawrence cut in.

"A man who is about to marry one woman, vowing love for the other?"

"My engagement with Clara Lansing was a mistake, a mistake which will rectify itself."

"Was? Why man, your engagement is announced." The nails went sharply into Allan's flesh.

"Bah," laughed Allan nervously, "bah!"

"You deny it?"

"Most emphatically."

Lawrence went into the next room and Allan heard him rummaging and moving about; presently he bolted in.

"Here it is," flourishing a copy of a society sheet. Turning the pages, his rapid glance went up and down the lines. "I saw it, I am sure—yes, here! Attention, please:

"The engagement between Miss Clara Lansing, niece of John R. Lansing, and Mr. Richard C. Allan, prominent lawyer of —— is announced; the wedding takes place in October.'"

Lawrence threw the paper upon the table, but the challenge in his eyes fell before the man who had sunken hopelessly into a chair.

Allan's head was down, his arms stretched upon the table—prostrate.

Lawrence, broad and sympathetic, could not understand the sudden collapse—but he felt instinctively that romance was ending and tragedy begun.

"Dick," going up to Allan and putting his hand upon his shoulder. "I'm sorry—I—take back all I said. I'm awfully sorry—if I can help?"

Allan's head swayed from side to side with monotonous motion. He did not speak at once, and Lawrence waited patiently.

"I guess it's all up with me. Of course," speaking

with new resolve, "you were right—the way you looked at it. It is clear enough now."

"Yes, yes, I know," interrupted Lawrence; "say no more about it. I'm a cad, dad take it! Of course you meant to do the right thing."

Lawrence moved a chair toward the table, and presently Allan spoke. The story opened with the visit to Kentucky. He told of the house in the blue grass country, with its big pillars, wide verandas and gas chandelier jutting out from the center wall, the garden redolent with many blooms, the old turnpike road leading to the violin master's house; the fashionable boarding-school that had its name in gold letters over the door; and the theater where the pupils' recital was given. He told of his return, John R. Lansing's kindness, and how, in the most inexplicable way, he had found himself engaged to Clara Lansing. He told of meeting Maithale again, touching lightly upon the moonlight revelation. And ere the story finished the jewels in God's clock disappeared one by one, and with the final word the great lid of that awful timepiece noiselessly closed.

It was dawn!

"She is the pearl," he said in the good-night to Lawrence; "every man is entitled to the love of one good woman. There must be something tangible, a substance, personality, to which one's lifted homage shall be paid."

"Amen!" sighed Lawrence.

Allan walked with Lawrence to the door joining his own room.

"I don't blame you at all," said Lawrence, "indeed I don't—I was jealous—furious! If I had been entangled with another girl when I met Dorothy, I—might have done the same, perhaps; I might, indeed."

The door opened—closed. Allan gave his attention to the lamp, he tried to raise the wick; the oil was spent; the light flickered—died! And the fire in the grate, only sufficient at best to bring cheeriness to the room, had gone out entirely. He leaned heavily upon the mantel shelf, sighed, and presently turned to his couch. But as his head touched the pillow, something scratched upon the window-pane. The grating sound irritated. He got up, walked over to the window, raised the sash a few inches.

A long, slim thing, barely discernible in the approaching dawn, crawled upon the sill.

"Come in worm," he said; "the early bird will get you." And when at last he slept, he dreamed that a cricket sang upon the hearth.

CHAPTER XII.

IF LOYALTY IS TO BE THE BOND.

BETWEEN the men who played with swords, and the women who tempered the steel, the dews of morning lingered long beyond the parting hour.

A rose—a good-by, and an incoherent message, and Allan was off. Dorothy was kind; Lawrence lingered, and he held her hands—lovely hands, white and dimpled. And, presently, when the confession was over and the absolution dispensed, he seized an advantage, her closed lids refusing to witness the passion his noble countenance betrayed. But he held her in his strong arms until her eyes, opening wide, answered deeply the question of his throbbing heart.

And when the boat pushed off, she entered the house, her cheeks June roses and the joy that was to last through long, happy years beaming in her sweet face. In such tender mood she was hardly prepared for the turn affairs had taken.

As she reached the staircase she encountered Maithale—a wrathful figure enveloped in a pink lounging robe, who flew at her breathlessly.

“I heard every word—I couldn’t run—I couldn’t get out of hearing. I came down—I thought they were gone—I was right behind that portiere. I heard every word—every word!”

Filled with delicious happenings, Dorothy did not realize that the scene had shifted.

"I am ashamed of you," the pink tyrant went on. Dorothy stared.

"You have no conception of a man's feelings—you think only of yourself. It is your vanity—your pride—your ambition to lead, to be admired."

"What are you talking about," Dorothy inquired at length.

"I am talking about you—you, and the shameful way you have treated Richard Allan."

"Richard Allan! You were behind the portiere when he said good-by?"

"No; I came as he left. I was going to the music-room, thinking the men had gone, when I caught sight of Ned Lawrence—poor fellow—waiting his turn; and of course, as there was no other escape, I just had to hide." She pointed to the drapery that hung to the left of the staircase.

Dorothy broke into a merry laugh, which only incensed the irate girl.

"You are a flirt, a wicked, wicked flirt."

Malthele grew in height as she delivered herself.

"You shall not break your engagement with Richard Allan; I say you shall not!" cried Malthele.

"Engagement? Oh, oh, if you don't stop your harangue I'll die; oh, oh," laughing and holding her hand to her side, "what a figure you cut in your wrath and pink gown. Richard, dear Richard!" she mocked, "and my beloved Ned hardly out of hearing."

"You wicked girl. Don't you remember the minister's sermon last Sabbath; don't you remember what he said?"

"No, I don't. Life is too short for sermons."

"He said," continued Malthele, "that a flirt is one of the gates of hell."

Dorothy's laughter instantly ceased. The girl before her, all at once, seemed very real; but she could not find the right words to say. She did not have much time for reflection, however; Maithale broke out again.

"You shall marry Richard Allan; you shall, or I'll become your stepmother and beat you."

Mechanically, Dorothy's hand moved to her brow, pushing back imaginary strands of dark hair.

There is something startling, ungraspable, in the sudden appearance in the new aspect of one whom we have always known and seemingly understood. She recalled Allan's parting words, and looked about, wondering what had become of the rose. With her own happiness so sweet and new, a great sympathy went out to the girl, who, at last wearied out, had thrown herself into the big, kid chair, and she recalled Allan's troubled countenance as she seated herself on the arm of the chair in which Maithale had dropped.

Women say bitter things to each other sometimes, without meaning or anger. Maithale's tirade did not impress Dorothy as containing bitterness, and, as she had never seen Maithale so terribly wrought, she bethought her that possibly she might straighten the difficulty by gentle probing.

"I would not like, little sister, to loom up in your vision, or anybody's vision, as a gate of Hades, and I hardly think I would submit to a beating even from so charming a stepmother." Dorothy spoke slowly. "Disabuse your mind on the subject of Richard Allan. I never for a moment loved him, though I will admit, I tried to make you jealous once or twice."

"Never loved him?"

Maithale's eyes questioned as Dorothy proceeded:

"I have known always that he loved you; but, little

sister, why did you not confide in me? Have you quarreled? He was so depressed this morning—and, oh, yes, what was it he said? Yes, I remember—he said: ‘That you knew—I knew, everybody knew.’ And then he gave me a rose for you—oh, dear, but he did look miserable!”

The rose had been trampled; but Maithéle discovered and pounced upon it.

“You see, Dorothy; I heard you both conversing last evening——”

“Why, of course; I knew you were in the path, silly, and I wanted to tease. He didn’t do a thing, but bore me nearly to death talking about you.”

A pained expression shadowed Maithéle’s face, and her voice fell.

“I don’t know what I am saying; but you see——” Maithéle twisted the lace jabot of the pink gown with little regard; it was nearly reduced to a rag. Dorothy interfered, as Maithéle concluded:

“You see, I didn’t know he was engaged to another until he told me.”

“Told you? And to whom, please?”

“There is nothing between us—nothing.” Maithéle walked over to the staircase, turning to Dorothy with her hand on the balustrade.

“I don’t mind it at all. I was afraid it was you, Dorothy, and, of course, I would love you always, even if you loved him, but”—with the semblance of a smile—“the other girl; I can just hate her!”

“Yet you don’t care at all, at all?”

Maithéle reached the first platform; a window open wide had upon its sill a row of potted plants, white and pink geraniums in bloom.

“I am not ashamed,” said Maithéle, plucking a flower,

"because there is nothing to be ashamed of. I have never loved any one else. Love—" she held the flower out admiringly, her head a trifle to one side—"is the divinity of the soul, and when a woman bestows such love which is absolute faithfulness—the purity of soul, she bestows all the great God has given her to bestow."

She looked straight into Dorothy's eyes, and defiance passed; her face illumined with that wonderful beauty that is a definite expression of greatness within.

"I do not understand the obligation that makes binding and irrevocable a man's or a woman's mistake."

"Maithale! And you infer that a man may win a girl's love and yet be in no way bound to marry her!" spoke Dorothy.

"To save both from cruel thralldom——"

"He goes off," cut in Dorothy, "with the girl he loves?"

"The other," answered Maithale, "would be happier without him—no matter what fate might be hers, it could not be so cruel as to be tied to one who could not love her."

Her eyes, sad and earnest, held Dorothy, and her voice, always melodious, dropped into a minor key as she went on slowly:

"Our Right to Love must exist if loyalty is to be the bond."

"Yet it does seem cruel to toss a girl over because a man chances——"

"Not chances—discovers."

"*Discovers*, if you like, the real life partner at the eleventh hour?"

"How would you act if put to the test, Dorothy?"

"I hope I may be too clever to arrive at the test."

"Exactly, my dear, because you are the right sort."

Instinctively, Maithale's thoughts reverted to the other girl, whose identity was not clear, sharply bringing her to account. Confident of Allan's genuine love for herself, she felt that the unknown was not the right sort.

Again she broke a pink geranium bud, wending her way to her room; and Dorothy, left to her own diversion, rummaged among the books and papers upon the table. But the paper she sought could not be found.

Lechaw-Hanna Camp was rather distinguished from camps pitched in the hills. It was *home* six months of the year for the Dales. Thus considerable thought had been expended upon its embellishment, which lacked display, that bold parade that traduces good taste and slurs refinement.

The windows of the spacious Camp were draped in white muslin; the floors polished and spread with Turkish and Smyrna rugs, and the furniture throughout quite in keeping with luxurious comfort and ease essential to the perfect attainment of enjoyment and rest. Niceness and daintiness touched with artistic fingers the smallest appointment of the room, and the *swastika* in old blue above the frieze on the mantel bespoke its meaning, "Good luck" and "Welcome!"

Dorothy's search was hopeless, and finally she inquired of the maid who entered:

"Yes, miss, Ben brought a copy from the Quarters just a while ago, and Jane is reading it this minute to the chef."

"If Jane would kindly——"

"Oh, certainly, miss."

Twenty minutes later Dorothy rapped lightly on Aunt Helen's door.

"Come," was the pleasant rejoinder, and Dorothy fairly threw herself into the room.

"Aunty—Aunty!" producing the sheet, and with enthusiasm that might have been excused in Maithele, "Aunty, dear, read this!"

"Why, read it, read it out yourself; what unusual thing has happened?"

But Dorothy was instituting search for the glasses.

"They are in my glove-box, there child,—there!"

"I don't see them."

"You never can find things, Dorothy."

Dorothy faced Aunt Helen, a playful sortie upon her lips, which did not escape, however.

"Why are you laughing? I see no——"

"Well, Aunty, it is enough to make Miss Jack Tiger laugh—the glasses are——"

"Well, well," blushed Aunt Helen, lifting her hand to her brow; "I must be getting old—you ought to have seen them at once, Dorothy."

"I did, Aunty."

"Well, well——"

And Dorothy placed her finger upon the paragraph.

Aunt Helen read the announcement with a sigh of relief.

"Really, a very nice young man, and, I hope——"

"How can you say such things? 'Nice young man,' indeed! Aunty, he is a villain!"

"My dear——"

"I mean it—I'm sure of it—I——"

"My dear, your father is most particular——"

"Aunty, don't say another word."

And the girl dropped softly at Aunt Helen's feet, her head in the lap of the elder, who, smoothing the dark hair, gently inquired:

"Has any one been trifling with my girl's affections?" Without looking up, Dorothy answered:

"I never see anybody when Ned's around."

"Indeed!"

Aunt Helen readjusted her glasses, looking over the rims.

She had been expecting something of the kind, because of the gentleman's attentiveness to herself.

"My niece has forgotten, perhaps, the duties of a hostess?"

"Listen, Aunty."

"I am all attention——"

"Well," lifting her head from Aunt Helen's lap, "last evening we young people got things all mixed up—but, everything is lovely now—between Ned and me."

"So it seems. But what have you and Mr. Lawrence?"

"Don't mister Ned, Aunty."

"My dear, I addressed Mr. Van Ransom——"

"Yes, but Ned is so awfully fond of you."

"I was the fiancée of Mr. Van Ransom; he was fond of me—but," she said, anxiously, "please tell me why you are charging Mr. Richard Allen with villainy?"

"Poor Maithale! You know, Aunty—Richard Allan——"

"Has not presumed?" Aunt Helen lifted her brows.

"Everybody presumes—even Pat; why, he calls us gals——"

"Dorothy, will you kindly get through with the preliminary."

"Now, don't hurry me, Aunty, dear; I'm sure I don't know a single thing about the affair——"

"What affair?"

"Why, just what I'm telling you, Aunty; Maithale is all upset. She never told me until this morning; but, of course, I guessed it long ago."

"Will you please tell me all you know at once?" Aunt

Helen's voice announced the severe note, and Dorothy went into detail at once.

"Well," said Aunt Helen, when the recital was over, "your father shall know of this."

"Now, Aunt, don't get things mixed up!"

"They are 'mixed' already, it seems. Where is Maithale?"

"In her room, Aunt dear. Really, I don't think she knows about this announcement."

"Leave the paper where she will see it."

"Terrible! Think how sudden it might be!"

"Then I will go to her——"

"No, no—you are sweet and very gentle, Aunt dear, but girls—girls are different; I will go to her——"

"Well," said Aunt Helen, "and report to me later——"

"Why, Aunt! I'm no go-between!"

"Why are you here now?" Aunt Helen was truly vexed.

"I thought you might suggest something. Just think Aunt, if Mr. Van Ransom had married the other girl, instead of dying, think how sad your life might have been."

"There was no other girl," said Aunt Helen, with spirit, "and that was years ago, before you were born."

"Were things so awfully different before I was born?"

Miss Dale removed her glasses preparatory to telling the oft-repeated story of her early courtship, but Dorothy fled.

Aunt Helen sat a long while by the open window after Dorothy departed, a troubled look on her face. The self-binding harvester was coming across the field, and her mind was diverted. She knew nothing whatever about the harvester, but the picturesqueness of it always ap-

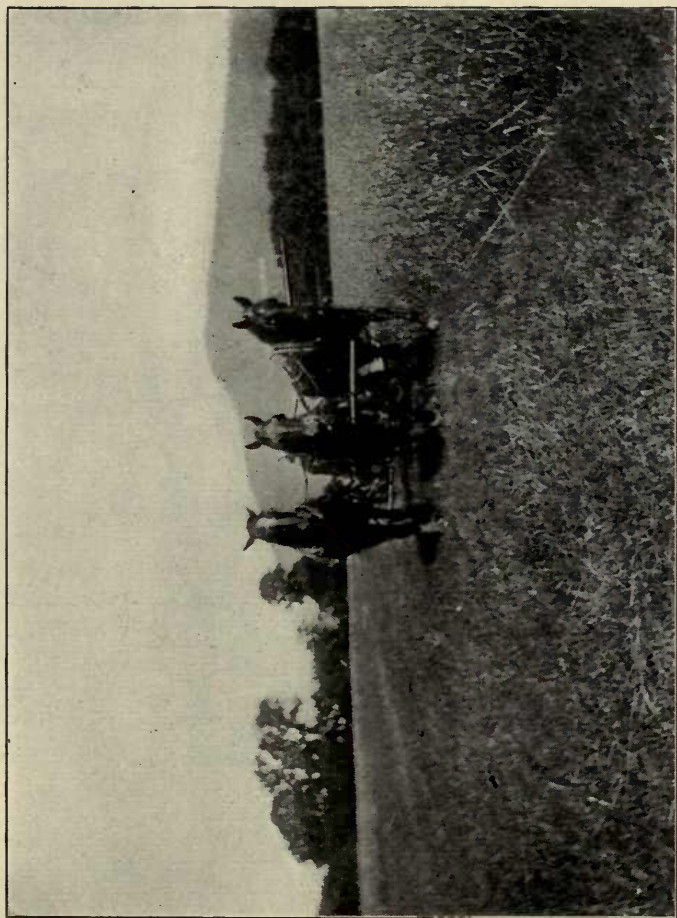
pealed to her. At the far end of the island, across the stream, towered a formidable culm hill, twinkling in the sunlight and contrasting in bold commercial endeavor with the poetic suggestion of life in the hills. Facing the house, and distinctly within Aunt Helen's vision, Campbell's Ledge loomed majestically, the great furrow in its brow disappearing as the midday hour sent a shaft of yellow light upon its dial face.

Aunt Helen's mind always turned to dark and bloody tragedy when she gazed upon the Ledge; a superstitious feeling came over her as she gazed. There is a certain weirdness to all wild stretches of forest, hill and valley, once the habitation of that swarthy race banished forever. Possibly, the religious belief of the red people that their spirits would return to inhabit the loved land for which they so savagely contended, is the influence. Certainly it was a conviction with Aunt Helen. One evening, while sitting at her bedroom window, musing over early pioneer days, a genuine war-whoop filled the stillness. Aunt Helen's fright was so extreme that she nearly fell senseless before realizing the Indian was only Silas Scott calling his dogs to order. At the present hour, however, her thoughts were gathering more important material. The new affair of her niece was not so important—she mentally commented: "Girls fall in and out of love so easily; it was not so in my day"—but Maithale's trouble was different, and she set about in her mind devising projects that might cut short the island season.

Two days later Aunt Helen accosted Dorothy.

"I wish your father had taken the cottage at White Sulphur."

"Why, Aunty, how can you? Think of the pleasure this place has been to him."



“COMING ACROSS THE FIELD.”

"The strike situation worries me," said Aunt Helen, evasively; "I think we might leave here anyway."

"The strike, Aunt, was here when we came, and I can't see that it makes any difference at all; and then, think of my ball! Haven't we planned about it all summer? And aren't dozens of our friends expecting invitations? Think, Aunt, a ball on the island! The papers will be full of it: 'Miss Dorothy Dale starts the fad'——"

"A fad is like pioneering—I think other people should do it. And your father decidedly objects to newspaper notoriety."

"But, Aunt, a girl must do something to become popular."

"A girl who honestly loves a good young man worthy of her should not aspire to popularity."

"But how may a girl be sure of the deep affection of the good young man without testing the affection."

"Words that have ruined many a life," said Aunt Helen, hanging the glasses upon the tiny hook secured to the bosom of her gown. Resting her hands in her lap, she regarded the niece keenly.

"Well," she said, and again, "well! Is it a new fad to make believe with honest intentions?"

"But, Aunt!"

"Not another word. I am surprised, that is all." Presently she inquired:

"Where is Maithale?"

"In the music-room. Don't you hear the violin?"

"And where is Mr. Ruford?"

"Jack? I think, Aunt, Jack is trying to make up for lost time."

Aunt Helen flushed, looking a trifle impetuous.

"How silly! I wish you were half as diplomatic as Maithale."

"I would hate to acquire diplomacy by such sad experience."

"Has she said anything?" persisted Aunt Helen, disregarding Dorothy's defence. Aunt Helen had some of the curiosity that comes with the footnotes that index the face.

"Why, Aunty," answered the clever niece, "Maithele is a diplomat."

CHAPTER XIII.

“YOU WOULD BE UNHAPPY AS MY WIFE.”

RICHARD ALLAN wrote Clara Lansing regarding the engagement announcement.

“I thought,” the letter stated, “a man should have something to say about his own engagement.”

The answer, coming by return mail, lifted his hope.

“Officiousness,” she wrote in return; “the society reporter should be suppressed.

And Allan telegraphed eagerly, grasping the proverbial straw:

“Send for the reporter; have the officiousness corrected. Have written.”

He felt the brutality of the message; but his case was desperate. Was he not bombarded in his own citadel by the unconciliating? Besides another must suffer if he passed the aggressiveness. His letter was gentlemanly in a measure; tender, touching lightly the point of honor—a veiled appeal to generosity.

The announcement had come like a sudden thunder-clap. In the awful din, he realized the force of the storm, and its determined course. He had been neglecting his fiancée, hoping earnestly that she might call him to account. But Clara Lansing, suspecting his attachment for Maithele, failed to take exception. Realizing fully that he meant to break with her, she had the announcement inserted in the society sheet. Yet

when Allan wrote her, she rested the blame upon the broad shoulders of the much abused. When the envelope with the huge monogram arrived, ten long days had intervened. One line—one! The lady would wire him—upon her return from the country, the letter stated. He tore the envelope, blue monogram—all, into shreds, consigning the bits to the waste-basket, and abused the office boy. It was the only thing to do.

On a very gloomy Monday evening toward the end of August the interview took place. With a flutter, Clara Lansing related many things that in no way bore upon the subject he had traveled miles to discuss; yet he had no desire to push her, entertaining conciliatory thoughts, hoping to lead gently to a full pardon of his grievous offence.

The conventions were passed; everybody was well; no disasters had occurred.

He explained at length the life of a business man, the crowding out of social obligations.

"I should have come at once, really—I should not have written."

She agreed with him.

"My telegram was not exactly what it should have been," he said at last; "it was too hasty."

"Telegrams always are," she said, and with considerable dexterity passed the telegram. Then in some way, he managed to bring the conversation around to the first days of their friendship.

He was gentle, very gentle; it was his way with women, and under the spell her usual calm was restored; yet, plainly, Clara Lansing had the situation carefully mapped out; she was prepared for any turn he might give the subject, and she was equally determined that he should have the lead.

Almost from the first moment of her engagement with Richard Allan, she had acknowledged to herself the chagrin of unrequited love. She knew the pressure that had been brought to bear upon the man; her own undisguised admiration and her uncle's generosity, and she only hoped for a gradual surrender. Clara Lansing determined to win him over, but she lacked the great depth and personal force necessary for successful conquest. The borderland of her vision was inclined to narrowness, though well defined; her thoughts trailed out or near its edge with given rule. She understood gaining and getting and the law that makes binding love thus obtained; but she did not, could not understand the other nature, entirely opposite, that spurns the laggard's gift, holding love to be a beautiful, free, unfettered thing, with wings outstretching to infinity. Neither could Clara Lansing accept defeat in the true womanly spirit that stands reservedly behind the silver shield of pride in the besetting hour. Some of Uncle John Lansing's coldness told in her face; in the corners about the mouth the lines were hard, and possibly a mere trifle of his peculiar generosity lurked in her breast. She was a woman who might acquire prominence and position, as Lansing acquired gold; but Love, the wary somnambulist, is not awakened or held by such methods.

Very nicely Allan turned the conversation from platitudes, drifting back to the first days of their friendship, hoping by so doing to keep himself, his fervorless actions, in a broad light.

She felt the atmosphere, the heaviness of it; yet she would not yield to its influence.

"Those were pleasant days, Clara, and the pity is that change should inevitably mark our hearts as it does the seasons."

"Indeed! I should be sorry to admit fickleness."

"Oh, I do not accuse myself."

"I hope you do not. I should despise myself if I could not be loyal."

"Sure."

He had fallen precipitously; she helped him to his feet; but rather madly he plunged again, this time encountering the stone wall. In his eagerness he had brushed important events lightly aside. She grew flushed while she listened, yet displayed not the slightest impatience to the end, which came at last, falling so flat that ordinary limitations were lost. When she spoke her self-possessed manner corrected a statement.

"It was after the hunt in the woods that my uncle rendered you a great service—or was it before?"

"Before."

"You have had difficulties since?"

"I have never called upon Mr. Lansing and—I met my obligations."

"I do not speak for my uncle—we will pass gratitude. I hate the word. I merely wish to recall the incident, which leads to something rather more important. It was after the hunt, then, that you proposed and I accepted you?"

"If you wish to be very exact," he said; "we were occupying a section of the accommodation train. The two weeks had been very pleasant—and—"

"You asked me to be your wife——"

He glanced at her earnestly, with a puzzled expression.

"A man don't forget a thing like that!"

"Yet four years—is quite a while."

"Four years," repeated Allan—and within himself he thought—"one month to a day before Maithale came east to make her home with the Dales."

"Did I ever return to the subject?"

"You certainly did. The following Sunday, uncle congratulated us both."

"I remember."

"And the night we went to the Twelfth Night dance—it was I who found the ring in the cake. Friends congratulated, and, possibly you have forgotten—'Wear it,' you said, and you slipped the ring upon my finger before the whole assembly."

"I had forgotten that! Yes, I remember, now that you recall the trivial incident."

"I did not consider it trivial, and I think many of those present might not have forgotten."

Allan nearly smiled, notwithstanding his troubled mood; he was thinking of the locket; the many faces he had placed within the casing—wondering if one of the simple courtesies extended might produce a claim. But, quickly, he dismissed the thought. Allan was far from being an egotist.

"Three occasions, Clara?"

She sulked, but only for an instant.

"Nevertheless, I have considered myself engaged—my uncle, my friends, accepted you as my affianced. We have corresponded; you have taken me about when here; you have been very generous—I mean, thoughtful——"

Clara Lansing held herself erect, and came to the end of her lines without a tremor.

"So you have thought best, Clara, to bring this affair to an end?"

She held her breath; there was no longer a doubt that Allan meant to boldly precipitate a crisis. An awkward silence followed his remark.

"I never considered you an ardent lover," she ventured, to fill the gap, "but I am not demonstrative

myself, naturally." She opened and closed the dainty fan in her hands nervously. "I have never doubted your affection. You are a gentleman, and, I have every reason to believe, a man of honor."

The fire in his heart, barely smouldering at this point, suddenly went out; she had thwarted his purpose. He had been standing, inclining against the piano; a few songs were upon the rack, he turned the selections idly. One chanced to be the one Maithale had sung to him the night of the anniversary. Memories rushed upon him in the trying moment; the floor beneath his feet seemed uncertain. He sighed, seating himself beside Clara Lansing in the tête-à-tête chair; sighed again. Her fan slipped to the floor by accident or design. He picked it up, and, before returning it, mechanically examined the pearl sticks.

Evidently the fan had received no injury. How enormous becomes the trivial thing, when the evidence hangs by a thread. The fan was his first gift to her; it had come in a nice disguise, almost hidden in a bouquet of red carnations.

"Haven't I kept it nicely?" she asked.

"Yes, where did you get it?" he inquired.

The sword of Damocles fell!

Silence in the critical moment is more weighty than words. Clara Lansing was clever! And Allan suddenly bethought him to renew the attack by taking the circuitous route. His voice softly modulated as he dropped into the chair beside her.

"I would not spoil your life, Clara, for all the world."

She brightened, and he went on slowly, his eyes fastening upon the bright rug at their feet; but the cynical expression about his mouth was rather too perceptible; she felt less confident.

“If we marry, you shall have no cause to complain. I will do my best to make you happy. I—I am glad you do not look for demonstrations. I would not care to disappoint you.”

A long pause followed, which to Clara Lansing seemed an eternity. At last he looked up—looked full upon the woman at his side, passionless, his eyes holding every detail of her perfect form. Her features were homely; she lacked—utterly lacked—beauty, that great essential, yet her figure was striking.

Clara Lansing’s constancy and loyalty flattered, even while her conduct repulsed and angered him; and he reasoned with himself now, as he had reasoned many times, that if Maithele had not crossed his path again, or, if finding her, she had been the wife of another, Clara Lansing might have become his wife. He had never loved her. The thing that stirred his heart, and brought about the proposal, was gratitude, over-exaggerated, and something besides—perhaps; that ingratiating influence often laid at the door of circumstances. At the present hour, when intuitively he felt that the cause of Maithele was growing less, love became the lambent flame—the one inestimable, precious thing, worth the struggle. It is impossible to appreciate thoroughly reciprocal happiness, until something has come between, and all in a rush he realized the hardship of coming years, should he be compelled to live with duty and a memory.

Lifting his whole strength for the supreme effort, his mind naturally made a concise, quick and careful resume of the situation. Meeting Maithele at Dale’s city home, the year following her father’s demise, he had realized to the depth of sensibility that she alone possessed his heart, but the fatal words had been spoken;

Clara Lansing had the prior claim. Maithele's manner, too, chilled him; though gracious and kind, she had not evinced eagerness or partiality toward him. He misconstrued her coldness, due perhaps to sorrows that coming all too quickly had bereft her of family and home, and he did not, perhaps, appreciate at once the reserve due to her bringing up. His visits to the Dale mansion were frequent; in fact, every run to the city meant a visit, and on several occasions Clara Lansing was neglected.

Like the unfolding of a bud, reserve had fallen, and the rose gazed wide-eyed into his soul.

He had come prepared to lay his heart bare, to humble himself, if need be, to Clara Lansing. It was hard on her, but just. He would tell the story straight, not sparing himself, and the inevitable might take its course.

"You are a good girl, Clara," he resumed, "deserving of a better fate than seems to be falling your way. I do not want to spoil your life; the marriage takes place, if, after hearing my story, you are of the same mind."

"I prefer not; I don't care to hear it. I—I—trust you, Richard."

"But you must. Another is concerned."

She winced visibly, and his purpose hung.

"Another time," she said, "when we are——"

He objected, adding quickly:

"We will never be in better condition to bear with each other."

Clara Lansing was a woman of indomitable spirit and determination, characteristics which, when nicely blended with consideration and unselfishness, elicit admiration; but, too often, indeed, accompanied by heartlessness and self-aggrandizement—the distinguishing qualities have narrowed the career of many a good man. Perhaps for the first time in her life, her purpose failed. Ignoring

her motive, he began the story. It was brief—very—as such stories should be.

“I met her first when I went south.”

“Yes, I understand; Southern women are great schemers.”

Silence fell between them. He passed the calumny with a sarcastic droop of the lower lip.

He proceeded with the simple facts, accusing no one, not even himself; barely stating the case, and carefully omitting the moonlight revelation and the anniversary dinner. It was only clear that he loved the other girl. He paused, possibly waiting the verdict, but it did not follow.

Her nerves were shaken; yet she gave no sign. Besides, she felt that concession might mean defeat.

He had expected an outbreak; her silence disturbed him.

“Well?” he asked, finally.

Her voice seemed inaudible—a trifle relenting.

“You should have spoken sooner; I could not bear the ridicule of being jilted.”

“Jilted?”

The word had a strange sound, far-off and bizarre.

“No, Clara, not by me. You surely can find an excuse.”

He lifted the hand that rested heavily on her lap, and placed it between his own.

“Think about it; don’t hurry; you would be unhappy as my wife.”

“I am decided,” she said, jerking the hand from his clasp; “the marriage takes place.”

He rose at once, tall and terrible in his own defense.

“Think what you are about, girl. Marriage, without love!”

She bit her lip until it pained.

"I almost hate you—I do hate her," she cried, petulantly. She was standing, one hand tightly clasping the fan, the other hard upon her chest with fingers clenched. Her eyes, brilliant with anger, flashed upon Allan with a look of deep enmity and passion.

"She shall not win—she shall not win!" Clara Lansing hissed almost under her breath. He did not catch the words at once—they seemed far-off, distrait; his senses were stunned, but he recovered presently, and, moved by a revolting spirit, spoke with quiet sarcasm:

"There would have been no question of prize with her."

He reached the door.

"Good-night, Miss Lansing."

She did not reply, and his hand touched the knob.

"Make all the arrangements to suit yourself." He lingered a moment, hoping she would speak. She did not. He opened the door, glancing earnestly toward her, then closed it, entered the reception hall, and, receiving his hat and cane, passed out into the night.

At the corner of Sixty-second Street he paused to strike a match; drew at the cigar; examined it; drew again, sending a long thin cloud into the warm night.

"Bah!" He threw the weed into the street, looking up and down that wonderful thoroughfare, whose life never dies. He saw a hansom approaching, hailed it, got into it. "Bah!"

The weed, perhaps, had left a bad flavor in his mouth.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GOOD INTENTIONS OF THE SCOTTS.

"SI!"

Mrs. Scott's chair was very near her husband's, and without effort she put her hand upon his shoulder.

"Is there anything queer going on up at Dales'?"

"Wa'al there might be, if Dale don't get the franchise through for thet 'lectric road. Allan's sort of rattled; can't get the up or down of him."

"Does he say anything?"

"Says everything but what he art to say; talks incessant but aint clear with his ideas—he's plumb off."

"Do you think Maithale has anything to do with it?"

"Can't tell."

"Hope they ain't no other woman."

"What kind of Mohawk do you think Dick is?"

"Do you mean a Mohawk can bear a temptation—stand it off, or thet he's a born faithful?"

"Whew! Louisa, the questions! I guess," switching from a dangerous subject, "he's just busy with that 'lectric road that's to run from the island to Wilkes-Barre in sixty minutes."

"I should think Mr. Dale's mines was enough for him?"

"Wa'al, I dunno; he gits sort of lonesome waiting for the strike to git ar-bi-trated. He took to that scheme same as the poet takes to the green wood, for recreation. It would cost him about as much to git thet railroad

a-running as it would for the poet to git his book of poems published, not counting circulating."

"I'm mighty glad that you took to dogs enstead of po-try, Si."

Scott laughed.

"The only difference," he said with a wink, "is thet if I was hard up, the dogs would sell, but the po-try wouldn't."

Mrs. Scott beamed upon her husband.

"You know a heap; did you grad-u-ate, Si?"

"Oh, I dunno; we didn't grad-u-ate in them days; we quit. If we thought we knowed as much as the teacher, we quit. In these days the kid keeps on hoping the teacher 'll learn from him. I didn't hev' easy schooling; dad larrupted me if I didn't go to school, an' the teacher larrupted me when I got there. I had generally don' something the day a-fore thet I couldn't recollect as well as him, an' the switch was alwus handy. So, as I wan't trying to cultivate his bad desposition, I played hookey most of the time. I guess I larnt what little the feller knowed, which wasn't enough to hurt."

Mr. Scott was fanning vigorously with his hat.

"It's the things thet ain't in books thet you got to learn to get on in the world," he said, and continued:

"Weth the map of Itily resting on the hilltops an' the guns of the Nation pintedly set to the valley it's most any time thet suthen might happen."

"I wouldn't set up nights thenking on it, Si."

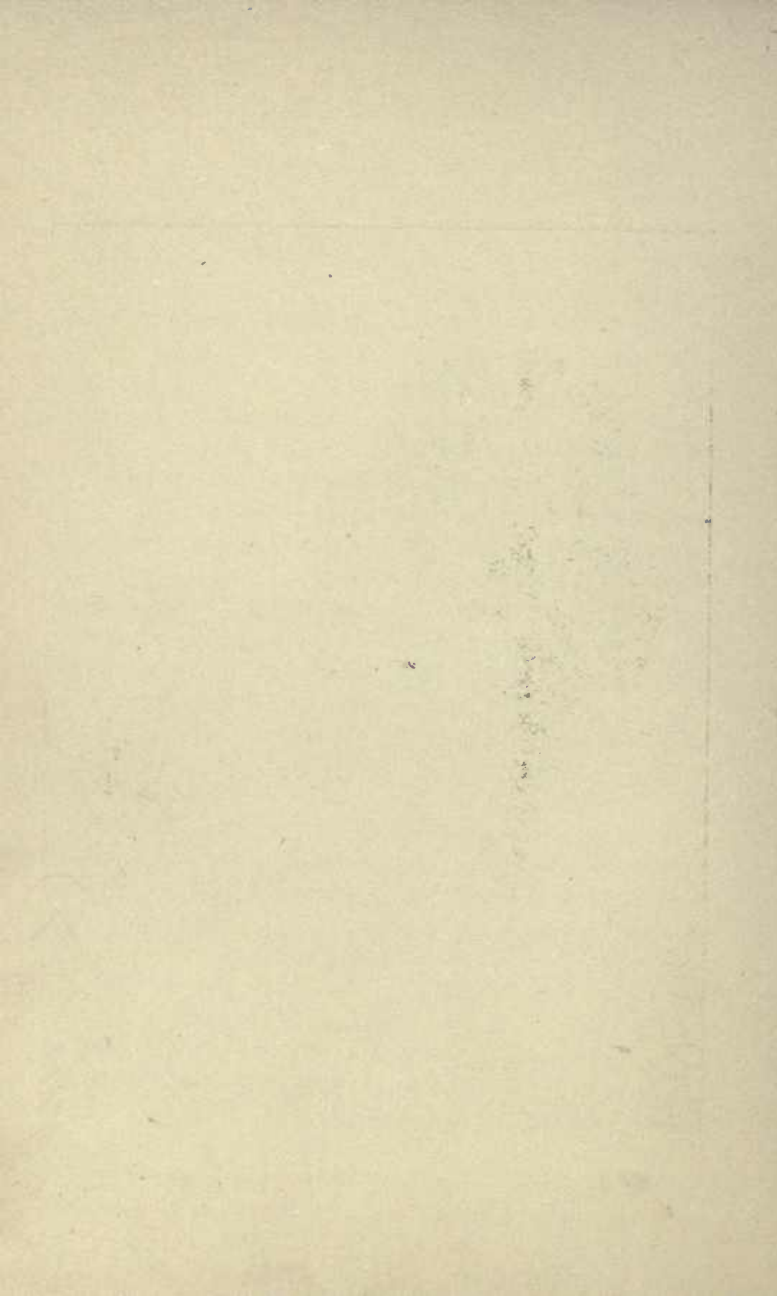
"I don't; the dogs is enough for me!"

And at this point a dissertation on dogs followed.

Mrs. Scott's attentiveness when the dog subject was on, amounted to genius. Scott loved this particular genius; an audience was his weakness. Dismissing the subject, he turned to Louisa with gentle consideration.



TIM SHINN.



"You got suthen on your mind, Louisa?"

"Mebbe I hev', Si."

She twisted the strings of her apron, and remarked tentatively:

"Maithele was here yestidy."

"Why didn't you keep her to supper?"

"Dorothy an' her aunt come later, an' they all went home together before supper-time."

"Mebbe they would 'a' staid if ye'd ast 'em."

"Likely they would—but I didn't."

Hospitality was the very spirit of Mrs. Scott. Recognizing the infraction, he prepared for trouble.

Mrs. Scott leaned back in her chair, a dreaminess, he did not miss, coming into her eyes.

"Maithele ain't one to show her feelings; I thought at first she was sick. I didn't ast no questions, but give her some catnip tea. You know, Si, how she alwus laughs when I give it to her. She didn't laugh yestidy—didn't even ast if there was sugar in it, an' fact is I hed fergot the sugar. She gulped the catnip down an' said, 'Thank ye.'"

"Hump!" grunted Scott. "Wa'al, Louisa, catnip 's only fit'en' for babies; cut it out—cut it out." He gave Mrs. Scott a playful push, and added a moment later, in sober earnestness.

"I wish thet girl could be adopted, it would be pleasant to hev' her around."

Mrs. Scott's gaze fell pensively upon the dogs gamboling on the soft green sward. Her eyes traveled far down the road, then back again to the farmyard, resting finally upon the man at her side.

"She's jest about," she said softly, "jest about what a girl of ours would a bin like if we'd hed one." She went on: "If she hed been ours from the start, we

might a-bin different. We'd hev' hed to live up to her an' gone to live in the city."

"Wa'al, Louisa, mebbe you be right, an' thet's about the only pacifying part of the setuation. I wouldn't never hev' bin content in the city, after spending the best part of my life in the kentry; and trotting around to shows weth girls ain't half so ent'taining as it seems. I guess I would rether adopt her now as she is growed up weth idees that hev' got re-qui-site understanding of other people's ways."

He put his hand upon Mrs. Scott's shoulder.

"So long as I hev' you, Louisa, I ain't complaining."

The following day Scott and Dale met on Susquehanna Avenue. As chance would have it, both men were going in the same direction. They cut through the side street, and made for the objective point.

They walked on discussing as usual the strike situation, which had become very grave.

"My sister is trying to coax me from the island. She has taken sudden alarm."

"You hain't had nothing stole?"

"Yes?" answered Dale, "one hundred hills of potatoes dug up last night. I shall keep a guard after this."

"Wa'al, folks hev' to eat," said Scott, with a sidelong glance. A man was sitting on a barrel at the side of a narrow street.

"I was thinking of my family——"

Scott touched Dale's coat sleeve significantly, as he addressed the man:

"Hello, T'omas."

The fellow had sharp brown eyes that peeped from between narrow slits.

Dale was passing on; Scott stopped short, addressing the fellow.

"I got a real curiosity up home, I was telling Dale here," jerking his thumb in Dale's direction; "two weeks old an' he's got a white tail an' a black head an' a tan body; never seen his equal before. Want him?"

The fellow grunted.

"Tell the boys I'll bring him down to the grocery store to-morrow; you can throw for him."

The fellow shuffled off, and Scott turned to Dale.

"Thenk twict before you speak onct in these diggings. I guess I hev' to give thet pup away—you'll know to-morrow if our folks is safe on the island."

Dale's friendship for Scott had not grown out of trifles as related. Dale admired Scott for certain qualities, qualities too often lacking in men of the world with whom he came in contact.

Dale was the cultivated gentleman, Scott the uncultivated, and finesse was not distinguishable between the two.

"The island's safe from the gnats," Scott whispered in Dale's ear the following day, "but eight guards ain't bad as a eye-op'ner. They don't mean no harm—got a sweet-tooth to fill thet ain't provided for by the union."

Scott's popularity with the union men could hardly be accounted for.

He did not countenance unions, and spoke his views openly. Almost in the same breath, however, he would remark, "Some few intelligent citizens must hold the money-bags, but, Mighty Powers, they ain't no one, nor company of One, entitled to the hull earth."

And when Scott arrived home the same evening he was met by Mrs. Scott, who said rather briskly:

"We air envited for next Thursday, Si?"

"Where?"

"Why, where should you 'spose? To the Dales'."

"What's the trick?"

"They hev' company—Philidelfy people. It's up to you, Si, though I ain't much on hossbacking around the kentry showing Queen Esther's Rock an' Forty Fort Church an' the like to strangers."

She led him to the kitchen. Going at once to the oven, she opened the door and peeped in.

"How they gettin' on?" he inquired.

"Fine," she continued, closing the oven door and putting things to order on the table. It was day-off for Prudence and the two were enjoying the kitchen.

"Thet Jack Ruford's going to pilot them 'round."

Scott was all attention. Any man of Northeastern Pennsylvania who elected himself postgraduate in the matter of piloting people about, explaining historic points of interest, he considered a rival. Instantly his mind evolved a plot to worst the wily Ruford. Mrs. Scott spoke again, opening the way with singular clearness. The idea had matured slowly in her brain. She might not have given vent to it then and there, but Si's ear, big and inviting, made temptation sweet. She leaned over and whispered—though there was no need—they were alone.

Then she returned to the oven, slipping one pie and then another on china plates and putting them in the upper part of the oven. "I hed the idee in my head for quite a spell that it would be fine to get Dick up here unbeknownst to him or her of our ententions."

"The very thing; I'll try it, Louisa, I'll try it. Wa'al, wa'al, the head you hev' got; if you'd bin a man, you'd bin a millionaire."

They laughed as children laugh whose cares are few, and playtime happy.





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"RAGGED CHILDREN SWEET AND HEALTHY."

CHAPTER XV.

THE PLEASURE JAUNT TO FORTY-FORT CHURCH.

THE morning was glorious and the party swung into the road that led with subtle dreamery through waving corn, cabbage and potato patches, fields of buckwheat in bloom, flaking the ground with white, like snow wings that will soon be coming. And Boreas, breathing through the trees, keenly suggested his waking mood that all too soon hurries the delicate foliage into shreds. On one side of the road where orchard and pasture suggest rural existence, they beheld a group of ragged children sweet and healthy, playing beside an old-fashioned well. They looked like wild roses that hedge the gardens. Some they saw laden with sack and basket climbing the dark culm hills that dot the valley, stealthily groping their way up the dark steep piles and returning again generously sooted, and heavily laden with anthracite chips.

At the bridge Mrs. Scott drew rein, addressing Aunt Helen :

"Si's expecting a friend over. Si sold his land up near the Perkins' house, leastwise it's liable to be sold before night."

The fib went unrecorded.

But Aunt Helen's solicitude as chaperon became apparent, and Mrs. Scott was merciful.

"We won't wait for him, if it worries you. I guess he'll ketch up."

And with a flop of the reins, the ladies proceeded on their way, Aunt Helen hardly interesting herself in the scenery, not being able to overcome her aversion for everything Indian. To Aunt Helen the spirits of the redmen seemed ever floating about the valley; no amount of coaxing could have induced her to walk upon an Indian mound, handle a tomahawk, or even touch an arrow-head. She had read one chapter on the Wyoming massacre in schooldays; it was enough. But here she was rushing to the scene of the tragedy. Dorothy inherited some of Aunt Helen's aversion for the early scalp-lifter, but guests had to be entertained. Maithele would enthuse over every incident touching romantic lore, and, so infectious at times is enthusiasm that Dorothy waxed eloquent later in the day as the owner of the Perkins house presented her with an arrow-head that had been found on the spot where a member of his family had come to an untimely end during that bloody battle that desolated Forty Fort; but Dorothy was in a happy state. Lawrence rode beside her. Love's miracle had begun.

Passing the Catholic church, the party continued down the street and soon entered the picturesque village of the miners. At the duck-pond, Dorothy tried a snapshot, but the dark visaged loungers on the green sward, and even the women and children idling, disconcerted; the picture failed. The equestrians went through the rugged section with easy canter, admiring the charm of the valley's chimerical irregularity and the panoramic magnificence of terraced wilderness. Now and then the serpentine Susquehanna shone between sedgy rushes, tall and undulating, like emerald reef bands, and shoots of dark willows recalling with drooping intelligence the awful carnage of the valley's past. Then hills of rhododendrons touched with sunshine invited thoughts to happier ways.

—the wonderful riotous bitter-sweet, daring top-windows of dark, apprehensive coal-breakers; the low wood fences tumbled and strung with wild climatis, elderberry and morning glories.

"Is it not strange," said Maithale, pinning upon her waist a dainty aigrette Jack Ruford, alighting, had plucked from the wayside, "that delightful environment should not produce contentment?"

"I am content."

{ "Don't jolly; I mean the mine people."

"They can't eat scenery."

"And do we? But it does invigorate the brain."

"Aren't you coming to anything?" called one of the Philadelphia girls, endeavoring to keep pace with the Kentucky thoroughbred.

"We have arrived at scenery," said Ruford, galloping to her side.

"Don't be absurd, Mr. Ruford——"

"I won't, thank you; but really, here we are at Queen Esther's Rock."

"We have arrived," called Maithale, as the party of equestrians drew rein.

She lifted her cap, saluting. It was a jaunty cap, white duck with black patent-leather tip.

"Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to present the distinguished professor of kinology, just arrived from Barneo." Ruford showed his teeth, which were unusually fine, and she went on:

"The gentleman is a natural product of anthracite soil, a graduate of the greatest college in the world—'Football Team.' He has traveled to New Zealand and Patagonia, and in rapid flights of imagination has penetrated the unexplored wilds of Africa. Thus—kindly follow me—he is eminently qualified to lecture on a sub-

ject that until Thursday last, he had not considered part of his repertoire."

This bit of bombast met with favor, and a voice cried out:

"Hear! Hear!"

She concluded:

"He will now proceed to give the history of the most stupendous and unparalleled crime ever perpetrated by a woman—the most cruel, audacious murderess the world has ever known."

The introduction over, Ruford bowed low, and was about to begin his lines as Lady Dee whinnied; which unusual diversion was all-sufficient. The younger Miss Rice giggled; she always giggled.

"Sh—sh—" came from Dorothy, "he is about to speak."

Ruford was slightly embarrassed, but his hour had come. He began modestly:

"This celebrated rock." An account of the Wyoming massacre followed that lasted ten minutes.

"Horrible!" said Miss Dale, who arrived on the spot as the address was nearing completion, but her exclamation was lost.

"There is more, there is more," insisted Dorothy. Maithale waved her hand.

"Proceed, they haven't had their money's worth."

He gave the history of Queen Esther, half white, wholly savage, whose horrible atrocities could never be enumerated. He then delivered the history of Forty Fort—constructed by forty pioneers who came into the valley in 1769, who were betrayed by brutes of their own race, and met her bloody tomahawk.

"In 1752, the cabin of no white man had broken the stillness of the Wyoming Valley," concluded Ruford.

"One hundred years ago, a certain distinguished judge tried to prove to an audience less enthusiastic than the one you are addressing, professor, that coal would burn," put in Lawrence.

"Only six months ago," Maithele added, "the strikers decided that it would burn, but they wouldn't let it."

The party moved on with laughter, gayety and persiflage. The road was smooth and wide; often the horses galloped or paced, five abreast.

Farms snuggling at the base of lofty peaks or dainty abodes standing brazenly by the roadside elicited the notice and often enthusiasm of the mounted party.

Finally, houses grouped near each other, laughter and the voices of children made life more distinct, and the road unexpectedly came to a turn at the foot of a hill. A vista opened bringing strikingly into view the old historic site of Forty Fort.

The party having dismounted wandered about the quaint burial-ground reading inscriptions.

"We will now investigate the inside of the church," exclaimed Ruford, in a dramatic voice, his courage rising, and as he opened the door of the church, a gust of cool air met the intruders.

Maithele hesitated, shivering.

"I hope we are not disturbing ghosts."

"They ought to be in their graves, anyway," sighed Lawrence.

They went inside, staring like children at the barrenness that confronted them. Dust was thick upon floor and pews, and Dorothy gathered her skirts, looking gingerly around.

"The church has never been varnished," explained Ruford, as the party proceeded up the aisle. And as

he called attention to the beams, a voice from the rear of the church called out:

"An' the timber was hewn weth ax before saws got into the kentry."

Dorothy turned quickly, exclaiming:

"Oh, Mr. Scott, how did you get here? We're so glad." As he joined the group Dorothy presented the Philadelphia girls.

"You are acquainted with the others."

"Slightly, daughter, slightly."

Jack was annoyed; Scott was a born narrator. The church was one of his special delights, and he proceeded at once, in the face of his rival, calling attention to the high doors of the pews which were fastened by means of wooden buttons.

"The rostrum is the perfect type of the high pulpit seen in England one hundred years ago," came the courageous voice of Ruford, and his professorship ended.

"What you know about a hundred year back? Only what ye gits out of books, an' thet ain't much." Scott walked over to the window, possibly to get rid of the tobacco quid. "Thet boy"—returning to the group—"thinks he hes the world in a sling."

Putting his hand upon a pew, slightly scarred by a penknife, he remarked, touching the deep dent:

"I knew the feller that done it. He was a red-headed chap, and dead set on Louisa."

The best man will sometimes gloat over the slightest misdemeanor of a rival. Scott shoved his hands into the side pockets of his round jacket and delivered himself with conviction:

"The evidence of bad behavior is sometimes the only mark a feller makes for himself."

The reference to the rival recalled other memories, for presently he said:

"Dad and me set right up here in this pew the fust time I seen Louisa. She was mounting the steps leading to the pulpit. She wa'n't going to preach; them wa'n't suffrag'st days. The minister was down sick and her dad was next best in the congregation. Her dad hed about begun to apologize for appearing before 'm when he missed his bandanny hankichef. Louisa fetched it up; it was a big hankichef, yellor and red, an' was, to my notion of thenking, the showiest part of the pufformance; but nobody expected anything, so they wan'n't desapointed." With another glance in Ruford's direction hardly encouraging, he continued:

"I bin living in thes part of the kentry for many years; I hev' knowed men who was here or whose grandads hed bin here before thes church hed a spike in it; so I guess I'm entitled to give a correct version, which ain't to be got from books."

No one had observed Maithele, standing with her back against the wall, grow suddenly white to the lips. A man passing the window was making straight for the church door. Scott was delivering a humorous account of a marriage that had taken place thirty years before, the contracting parties being a French woman and a Shawnee chief.

"He shall not enter," she said; "he shall not!" But a tremor had come upon her, and with clasped hands she leaned heavily against the wall.

In a moment he would be upon the steps. Quick! She glanced at the group; they were entranced with Scott's story and she hurried to the big door, and faced Allan.

"Stop! You must not enter."

Her voice seemed far away. "You are not—not invited."

Instantly he was transfixed.

But it was the echo of her own words that stung her.

"Go away," she spoke in softer tones. "Please, before they see you."

"I beg your pardon, most humbly; I did not mean to intrude. I did not know; there is a mistake. Scott brought me here."

He paused, a proud defiance in his tone. "Certainly I will not intrude," he repeated.

She turned to the door, but he caught her gently by the sleeve.

"I must speak to you; there is something I must say."

He passed the cruelty of her words in his eagerness to get her attention.

"I do not care to hear."

Her hand was on the door, with an effort she tried it, but it was heavy and would not open.

"You shall listen—you shall know the truth—you must know it. I have tried so many times——"

"I will not listen; there is nothing you could tell that I care to hear.

"Maithale!" he cried, "in mercy listen, there is so much and——" There was a noise as of steps coming toward the door. She inclined her ear attentively.

"Quick! Go! They must not see you."

"I will remain. I will speak before them all. Dear!" he pleaded, "please, I shall not be treated like this. I shall speak before them all."

"You must go," her voice nearly broke.

The party was advancing; in a moment the door would open. She looked at him beseechingly:

"If you will go there," she whispered, pointing to the

side of the church, "I—I will speak to you when they are gone."

He obeyed; and even as she slipped the big key out of the door the party came out.

No one had observed her absence, save Scott. She touched his arm and whispered:

"Leave the mare!" At the same time she put the key into his hand, turning to Ruford:

"Mr. Scott and I will follow presently."

Ruford looked the chagrin he felt, but Scott carried the day.

"We'll ketch up weth you, if we don't change our minds and run off."

Ruford was saying something.

"Oh, the key? Wa'al, it's safe with me," said Scott, and Aunt Helen was glad when Old Sorrel's head turned homeward.

"The maids will have the luncheon spread when we reach the Perkins place," which remark Mrs. Scott did not hear. She had caught sight of Allan at the side of the house, and observed, with old-time roses tinting her cheeks, that Si and Maithale remained behind. But things were not so easy with Scott. Maithale turned upon him when the party had gone:

"Why did you bring him here? He was not invited; besides—I hate him!"

"Wa'al, I'll swan!"

His quick wit deserted him, and he slunk away with his hands deep in the pockets of his round coat.

He walked eastward, and stood in solemn contemplation above a new grave.

"I'll swan! if it don't beat creation! If I'd knew I wouldn't took so much trouble. Anyway, I might of fetched Ted or Tasso along for company."

He stretched his limbs and yawned:

"It'll git lonesome before she takes thet back." Seating himself on the newly-made grave, he produced a hunk of tobacco, but he hardly twisted a morsel and lifted it to his mouth, ere he jumped to his feet.

"Don't like to set on folks thet ain't thoroughly moulded; no tellin' how close their spirits be. Guess I'll look after the hoss."

He stalked off, bobbing his head in a sort of forward motion.

"Wa'al I'll swan; think I'd better take to stretching my own judgment now an' then."

CHAPTER XVI.

WE TWO SHALL GO OUR SEPARATE WAYS.

"You have something to say," she interrogated as Allan came forward.

His purpose might have failed utterly, but marking the slight trepidation in her voice, his courage lifted.

"I—I was not responsible for the announcement."

"That is your excuse?" she inquired icily.

"No. It is this: I——"

"Could not discriminate between two women?"

An agony swept his face. All the irony and spleen of Clara Lansing's nature could not hurt as the slightest innuendo from the girl he loved.

"I can swallow the medicine, only please, please, allow me to speak the truth."

"Don't torture yourself."

Thrusting her hand into the pocket of her habit, she brought forth a daintily scented letter, addressed to "Miss Dorothy Dale."

The letter reached the island the day previous, but Dorothy turned it over to Maithale only an hour before the party set out.

"I do not care to take your time, and you will please not detain me; kindly read."

He took the letter from her hands mechanically, recognizing the chirography his expression changed. The letter was a trifle expansive, but he merely glanced over it.

"Please do not skip," spoke Maithale, observing his countenance. He had come to the part of vital importance, and he read aloud:

"Of course, you know that Richard Allan has been my devoted for years. We have decided at last upon October first. You will, of course, run down for the ceremony. I want so much to have Miss Burton maid of honor. I do not know her so well, but Richard speaks so highly of her. I thought the compliment nice to him."

It was Clara Lansing's first inning.

He was silent for several seconds.

"Maithale," he began, quietly, "listen to me."

"I do not want to listen! Why should I? What did I do to you—to her! How did I know? Oh, it is intolerable—cruel!"

The pathos in her voice always stirred him. He fancied often in the quiet hour, in the poetical pause of life, that the voice calling to him were he in his grave might resuscitate life.

"Dear!" he said, "you shall hear me! Please!" He opened the big door, gentle, coaxing her within.

"Sit here," indicating the steps at the side rear of the church, leading to the gallery above.

"Dear!" he whispered again. But pride, the mighty rescuer, oftentimes saves one's self-esteem.

"I shall not remain. Please say what you have to say at once." And wearily she took the seat indicated, but in a moment she broke forth again:

"I hate myself, and I despise her!"

"Dear," he repeated, dropping beside her on the step, "say something—I don't mind; the agony of it all"—resting his hand upon her arm—"the agony—is, that I discovered too late that you cared!"

"I don't care! I never did care! I only thought I did! Oh, to be humiliated! It is intolerable!"

"I would die to save you the slightest humiliation."

"Indeed! And a moment ago you almost demanded an audience!"

His voice was humble.

"I did not know of the letter then. I was willing to explain—I was desperate."

She disregarded. Her voice was not cruel, only the words were hard, the voice never sounded sweeter to Allan, more full of pathos.

His eyes closed and he leaned heavily against the wall. When he spoke again, his thought seemed rather distraught.

"Why—why—nobody knew—our engagement was so brief——"

"There never was an engagement—and, please—you have said too much."

He felt the rising spirit.

"I have never said too much—to you," he persisted.

"That is the trouble; I said too little."

She sighed, and, finally, with a pleading note:

"I wish you would go."

"Not until I have told you that although engaged to Miss Lansing—I—always—always loved you——"

"Everybody knew——" She paused abruptly, and he waited, feasting his eyes upon her lovely face.

"What?"

"People can be so detestably sympathetic. Dorothy nearly stands behind my chair, Aunt Helen even offered to get rid of Miss Jack Tiger, if her purring annoyed me. Mrs. Scott is abusing the whole world—and——"

"Dear little girl!"

"Please," with a sob in her throat, "don't 'dear' me."

Her words were words again. Their dulcet tone encouraged, and he smiled upon her.

The white riding cap lay in her lap, her face was buried in her hands, and an inquisitive yellow beam, glancing down from an upper window, touched her. A miracle followed; the soft wealth of wavy brown hair was a mass of twisted gold threads. Very gently his hand rested upon the beautiful head.

"One strand," he whispered, "is worth——"

The door of the church creaked—opened—closed.

He faced about; too late!

A glance had satisfied the intruder's curiosity.

"I hope," said Maithale, rising, "Mr. Scott is not leaving me."

Allan hurried to a window.

"No, he is the reliable; the flying horse bears a youthful rider, a red jacket and a blue cap."

"Miss Rice," spoke Maithale. "I wonder why she returned?"

"It might have been a villager."

"Hardly? Our guest is the freaky-picturesque of the hills."

The intruder hardly produced salutary feelings. Maithale had other thoughts for the moment, but Allan's voice recalled her:

"The only joy in my life will be," he began once more, "that for one glorious hour I had your love."

She turned her troubled face upon him.

"You never had my love. Never!"

He knew otherwise—listening as she breathlessly continued:

"I never loved you—never? I never shall love any one. I hate men, and I just despise women."

The eyelids drooped and the long lashes nearly swept

the cheeks; the mouth—the intensely fascinating mouth—languished.

He rejoiced—her very look was love.

“It is a long story,” venturing gently.

But she rose at once; he stood beside her.

“I don’t care to hear it—I want to go outside—Mr. Scott is waiting—please—if you will let me pass.”

She was tired out, and the cruel rush of memories upon her sympathetic emotions was forcing the eyes to an embarrassing confession.

He lifted her face; they were so near. Tears were interfering; she was ashamed—ashamed that he should see! While trying to conquer them, he pressed an advantage, his arm stealing about her waist.

“Oh, why,” her voice came at last, “why did everybody die belonging to me!”

“Lily of God—I belong to you!”

She did not speak; could not, perhaps, and an intense expression swept his countenance.

“By every right of heaven and earth!” he cried, “I—I cannot—cannot,” passionately folding her to his heart, and with an upward appeal, that mayhap reached the Throne, “I cannot, will not, give you up!”

She felt a dreaminess, and then his lips upon eyes, hair, mouth.

The certainty of mutual feeling is never a hopeless disregard, nor does it ever meet a swift rebuff.

In a moment, however, she was free of his embrace—free, unfearing, yet trembling.

“I beg of you, I must go.”

“I shall not detain you long,” he said, “but you must hear me. It is just to you—to myself. Forgive! I promise, I shall not forget again!”

She seated herself wearily, resting her head against

the wooden railing of the stair; he followed her example, subsiding upon the step below, and rested his shoulders against the unvarnished wall.

"Since the first hour when I saw you—a little girl in white frock and black ribbons, facing a great audience, refined, cultured, gaining its attention and meriting its applause—since the first moment, I have loved you! I realize now that it was your soul in the melody that awakened my own soul to hopes, dreams, too sweet to be fulfilled."

Her eyes were quite closed and her hands rested in her lap; her whole attitude expressed weariness—surrender. But the keen, fine intellect, the unselfish nature of Allan absorbing, by a quick glance, her hopeless attitude, determined to show that mercy due the woman he loved.

He passed the selfish joy her presence afforded him, and hurried through the details, with clear, concise understanding. He did not spare himself, hesitated only where Clara Lansing was concerned, and passed lightly as possible the interview in Clara Lansing's drawing-room. Her eyes were very wide, as the story came to an end, and their great depths spoke the change that was taking place in her judgment of himself. She sighed once, sighed again, and shivered perceptibly when he mentioned Clara Lansing. With that pretty manner so natural and unaffected, her head dropped to one side, the hands resting under the chin.

The church was so very still—sometimes as he paused the last word falling from his lips flew up into the rafters and returned again faintly, like the echo of a sigh. His voice ceased at last.

"That is all—dear heart."

She had not spoken during the recital, and as he turned to her expectantly she leaned forward, resting

both hands upon his head, and he felt the benison and the forgiveness.

"I understand. One must be sacrificed. I will be that one. You will be kind to her—faithful." She paused, her eyes afar; possibly they rested upon the spiral stairway leading to the rostrum, possibly passing the rostrum to the hollow recess above; she saw nothing. A blackness hung before the future—cold and desolate.

"After all, Richard, she loves you and you are not blameless."

She stood up.

"I will go now to Mr. Scott."

They went forward, but, reaching the door, she turned to him:

"Stay; Richard, I will go alone."

He understood.

With her hand upon the door she faltered and quickly his arms extended pleadingly.

Her head swayed an instant:

"I am glad that I listened; glad that I know——"

Her voice broke, but instantly she grew strong again.

"The life we have lost is the higher gain; in spirit I will be with you always, dear Richard."

He moved a step forward, but she lifted her hand, the light in her eyes unmistakable.

"We two shall go our separate ways. Good-by. You are a man, brave, upright! Honor, Richard, is more than love—good-by. God be with you!"

The door opened—closed. And he sank into one of the high pews, a sob more despairing than the old church had ever heard, breaking upon its stillness. But the indulgence of tears is the unpardonable sin. He lifted his bowed head. The call to active life had sent a warning note.

"Yes, there is time," he said, listening, "I must be off; they must not find me here."

And even as he mounted his good horse, his vision fell upon the woman he would always love. She was walking slowly toward the church.

There are pictures that live to the end of one's days, and, mayhap, are carried to that life beyond.

"God be with you, dear," he murmured.

She did not hear—did not see. He lifted his hat, and his horse plunged forward.

The braver the heart, the clearer the brain, the more intense the enduring quality—the capacity for suffering. The noblest aim is holding the sun of one's nature as a guard at the door; for, there is grayness so deep and tears so bitter, that did the gold shield but momentarily vanish, the rush forward of darkness would surely envelop the very soul.

Maithela was glad that the day was over—glad when at last she could retire to her own room and the solitude the hour afforded. She had not given the smallest hint to any one; not even Scott had been able to penetrate beyond the quiet reserve that proved nothing.

But the heart overflowing must have its outlet. She communed with the violin, and the strange mysterious wonder of its sympathy, calling with tender resonance from a chapter ended, soothed and lulled and lifted her drooping spirit.

It was over. The big clock at the end of the hall told the mid-hour. She dropped upon her knees.

"Heavenly father!"

Sweet, simple, human cry!

It was enough. The spirit of Night bore upward the pearl of immolation.

CHAPTER XVII.

TEDDY R. FIGURES IN A TRADE.

SCOTT had been away from home several days. Possibly the dogs miscalculated the time of his return.

It made him feel young and happy to see Louisa waiting in the open door and to hear the yelping and barking of his good friends on the far side of the fence.

He had driven up to the gate about dusk.

Mrs. Scott's quick ear catching the sound of wheels, she had the front door open before the master alighted, but the dogs were not in evidence.

"I declare, Louisa," he said, coming up the steps, "if thes is the way the dogs protect you an' receive me, we better git rid of the bunch."

They went inside. Having gained the confidence of Allan to the extent that Allan was bound to Clara Lansing, Scott constituted himself go-between. The mission had not failed utterly, yet Scott was out of sorts. After a light supper he retired, promising to regulate his household in the morning. But it was quite in the afternoon of the following day before the dogs were called to order.

Mrs. Scott's first intimation of a hurricane was the sliding of Tasso into the living-room, a weary look on the sad, thoughtful face as he found a dark corner and curled up into a knot. She began at once to gather the socks and darning cotton into a bundle.

"It certainly is a shame the way Si do go on at times. Tasso you hev' sense; you won't git hurt if you keep out of his way."

She passed through the hall, calling Prudence to order, entered the kitchen and poked her head out of the window.

"They be jest about as contrary as human beings," Scott declared as Louisa remonstrated with him.

"You don't know a dog 'tel you hev' hed him about ten year, then his qualities stand prominent as he's most ready to die."

He paused, glancing at his wife.

"I have a notion to trade Ted."

"If thet's all the trouble, there be Andy Brownson hanging over the fence now; you might strike a bargain."

"See here, Louisa, I said I hed a notion to trade; no call for jumping a fence weth a bargain. Besides"—jerk-ing his hat from his head and fanning with it—"the world wa'n't made in a day."

"Ho, there Andy," called Mrs. Scott; "Si wants to sell Teddy R."

Andy slouched through the gate, a podgy fellow in a short russet coat and jean trousers, rather baggy at the knees. His hair was red, his skin freckled. Andy was a type; dozens of his kind might be found within walking distance of the nearest town.

Andy passed the compliments of the day to Mrs. Scott and came directly to business with Silas.

"What'll ye take for him?"

"What'll ye give?"

Instinctively the dog felt himself discussed and naturally concluded the trouble meant a flogging.

Mrs. Scott had come into the yard and was standing by the steps.



TEDDY R.

Ted crouched servilely at her feet and Andy passed Scott's interrogation, his hands deep in his pockets, while Andy with one foot kept up a shifting motion with the ground.

"How long ye had him?" Andy inquired.

"Long enough to know his qualities."

"Is they bad or good?"

"Middling."

Comment might have ended had not Andy put his hand caressingly forward.

The dog snarled, and a merry twinkle came into Scott's eyes.

"Ted'll stand a licking from home folks, but he won't be pawed on by strangers."

Andy moved to a respectable distance and Ted blinked knowingly, wagging his tail. With manner inclined to chuffiness Andy advanced.

"Whet's yer price?"

Scott waved his hand deprecatingly:

"Wa'al, if it's up to me," said Andy, "five plunks down and twenty on time."

Scott's face was a study. He sat down upon the kitchen steps, jerking his slouch hat over his eyes.

"If Louisa wa'n't around, Andy Brownson, I'd tell you to go to a kentry where they use brimstone for kindling."

Andy grinned.

"Much ableeged for the presence of Mrs. Scott." He scraped his foot and nodded his head at the lady.

He was standing beneath an apple tree that grew near the kitchen window, whittling with a huge knife.

Scott was annoyed. Hacking a fine tree is vandalism and Scott hinted that Andy's rudeness was objectionable.

"Brains is all alike, Andy, only some people's seem to be alwus going round like they was in a tub of water."

"Bow-wow" called Teddy R.

"You shut," called Scott, giving his attention again to Andy. "You've heard about George Washington's hatchet? Now what I thenk thet chap used on his dad's apple tree, Andy Brownson, was a knife."

Andy took the hint, shoving the knife into his pocket with a grin.

"I hain't throwing money to the birds," vouchsafed Andy, affecting a renewal of the proposed sale.

"An' we ain't in habit of fleecing sheep."

"I'll raise," continued Andy, unheeding. He had always wanted Teddy R.

"I'll trade the calf and about seven of them ginny-hens into the bargain."

At the word guinea-hens, Mrs. Scott lifted her hands in horror.

"Lan' sakes alive! Ginny-hens! Why, Andy Brownson, if you so much as show a ginny-hen thet gate," pointing to the side way, "I'll hev' you up at meeting for other things you hev' done—certainly worse."

"Con'soun' your empitence," said Scott, cocking his hat; "I'm half a mind to sic' the General on you. Five cash an' twenty on time, seven ginny-hens an' a calf for a thoroughbred like Teddy R!"

"I can stand for anything but ginny-hens," put in Mrs. Scott, loquaciously.

"Mebbe, Si," Andy insinuated, "ye'd like my house an' lot throw'd in."

His expression was mean and he assumed a rowdy manner.

"Mebbe I wouldn't consider it weth the farm added."

Andy's eyes opened wide; he picked up a twig that he

had broken from the apple tree and hurled it straight before him, looking at Scott keenly, and with a leer and a wink:

"If I'd throw in the old woman?"

Andy was newly married, and his wife was quite pretty.

Scott was on his feet in an instant.

"Don't use common talk before Louisa." Scott doubled his fist. General felt trouble. A peculiar look or sniff in the air brought up the forces, and Andy sent longing glances toward the fence, calculating leaps.

Scott anticipated.

"Ted would git ye, if General missed. There be the gate. I know you now Andy Brownson for a ornery brow-beat. An' Andy," calling to the retreating figure, "tell your friends the encounter, if you mind, an' put thes on to it: Thet dog, notwithstanding his natural proclivities, ain't got no price."

Andy was rather glad to have gotten off so easily. He did not turn to say good-by or lift his hat to Mrs. Scott, but passing through the side gate, paused only a second, shaking it slightly to see that it was secure.

"Wa'al," said Scott, watching the retreating figure, "if I wa'n't a gentleman, I'd call thet feller a skunk."

"Ginny-hens," repeated Mrs. Scott, "ginny-hens." And laughing softly, the lovers went inside, Prudence banging the kitchen window, which signal meant considerably more than the customary "dinner is served."

The table looked inviting, and Mr. and Mrs. Scott sat down, Scott beginning at once to carve the fowl. Scott was a dextrous carver; the bird was roasted to a turn, and as he lifted it gracefully Mrs. Scott smiled to see it part beautifully on the fork."

"Wa'al, my dear, what'll you hev?"

Scott rested the big knife and reversed its two-pronged mate.

Mrs. Scott always claimed gizzard and heart, leaving the supply to Scott's generous hand.

"Oh, anything, Si."

"Might as well hev' your choice."

"Hev' your way, being's ther's no company." Prudence passed the vegetables and retired.

"Shet the door," said Mrs. Scott gently to Prudence; "there be a chilly feelin' coming from the kitchen."

"Yes, 'um," the girl replied, "an' if you want anything, ring the bell hard. I might be out'n the road talking with Andy."

"What?" exclaimed Scott, with ire; "thet feller ain't still hanging around this place?"

"He's gone, sir, I think; but he might return—me and his wife's kin."

"Wa'al, I'll swan! Mighty glad, Louisa, the kin ain't on Andy's side or she'd hev' to go."

Mrs. Scott thoroughly understood the man she loved; she did not interrupt as he made several strong remarks regarding Andy. She held her peace until the wine was served.

Scott had brought the bottle up from the city the evening before, and she knew that bouquets were in order.

Tasting the beverage, she nodded approvingly.

"I'm glad the dinner ain't disappointing, for the wine isn't."

"Glad you like it. It didn't cost much," chuckling.

"You art n't to spend your money reckless, Si. I'm willing to bet that bottle cost about a dollar."

Scott broke into a hearty laugh.

"Yes, Louisa, it cost about a dollar, more or less."

"I hed a mind," she said, tactfully, "to ast you how you got on in town yestidy."

"Oh, middling; I meant," he continued, "to tell you last night, but I was so blamed riled an' upset."

"I know you was, dear."

"Louisa!"—he paused, helping himself to a radish—"I'm goin' to see thes thing through."

As he went into detail the silver fork stood upward in his fist, which now and then came down heavily upon the table. "I'm going to see thes thing through. Love's a real campagne, Louisa; an' it's jest as fair for me to play scout in thes engagement as it was back in Civil War times."

He took a generous taste of the wine and nodded to Mrs. Scott.

"Ye're right; it's fine."

The object of his trip to the metropolis having formed the preliminary, he came at once to his story. So far Mrs. Scott had not made the slightest comment; she hoped he was leading to the subject at heart. His next words reassured her.

"I dropped in on Lansing yestidy."

Her heart bounded, but she gave no sign as she inquired, calmly:

"An' bought a slice of wuthless stock, I'll be bound."

"No, Louisa; I might hev' done thet twenty year ago—I only promises to buy these days. Howsomever, Lansing is a rare old chap. He was mighty pleased weth my counterfeit ententions."

Another generous sip of the wine, and he proceeded:

"I worked my way to an envite to the house."

"If you promised to buy the stock, you hev' to do it, Si."

"Wa'al, yes, if I'm driv' to the wall? But it ain't

likely thet I will be," he went on slowly. "I hev' a snug sum put aside for a wedding thet might take place. Better use it to get, 'm, married, then save it for the occasion thet might hev' bin."

"You got an awful head, Si."

Neither spoke for a moment, and then, nearly overcome with anxiety, she inquired, straightforwardly:

"Did you see Clara Lansing?"

"Thet's what I went for."

"An' what did she say?"

"Wa'al, she didn't take me into her confidence."

"She didn't?"

"No, she didn't; but I took her into mine."

"I hope you didn't come right out an' say things?"

"Wa'al, I didn't set around chewing the cud; after we'd conversed for a spell I ast her out for a drive."

"You did! I hope your necktie was on straight."

"Oh, I guess it was—I spruced up some."

"I'm mighty glad you did; they air mighty set in N'York about looking jest so."

"She didn't seem overwilling to go at fust?" Scott ventured.

Mrs. Scott held her head high.

"I think a queen might be proud to ride with you, Silas."

"Mebbe; but I don't take to foreign'rs, so there ain't bin any o-casion to find out. Besides, I hev' never seen a real queen. You be about as——"

"Oh, go on, Si," she cut in. "Don't study so much about me; I'm dying to hear what you an' Clara Lansing had to say."

"It was slow at fust," he began. "I hed the rig waiting at the sidewalk, an', as she was fixed up real han'some, we walked out an' got into the rig. We rode

on an' on wethout saying anytheng—couldn't make her talk. But on the home stretch we was neck to neck."

"Silas, do you mean thet in hoss sense, or——"

Scott laughed.

"It's a real fact."

His wife looked dubious, but brightened again as he continued:

"I tol' her a lot of nice things about herself, an' thet got her pleased. Presently I said, 'Miss Lansing, do you want a fine dog?' "

"Si, you didn't!"

"Suthen hed to be sacrificed; besides, I don't like the ways of Teddy, Jr. I ast her to come down to our place an' rest a spell before the wed'ing."

"Now, Si?"

Scott chuckled, thinking how easy it would be to break the engagement if he had succeeded in getting her to his place.

"Declare!"

"What did she say?"

"Declined! Then I said, fair and square: 'You and Dick Allan never going to hitch, girl!' I thought I hed give her one, but she says, with a toss of her head: 'We be the best jedge of that.' "

"Then what did ye say?"

Mrs. Scott was all excitement.

"'Oh,' I said, 'it don't make no difference—marry one day, di-vorce the next.' I thenk I sent a bomb into camp, but can't tell."

Mrs. Scott's excitement passed to instant depression.

"Hev' the wing, Louisa?"

She passed her plate.

"Did she ast about the Dales? I would 'a' thought she hed some curiosity."

"Some," repeated Scott; "she has her share. But it's the eddicated kind—that sends out feelers; for enstance, she said it was too bad Dorothy's ball was booked for the same date as her wed'ing."

"I hope you ain't meddling over-much in other people's affairs, Si."

"Thet depends on what you calls meddling. Wa'al, I ain't poking my head into the halter."

Mrs. Scott broke in:

"I bin studying the ins an' outs of the setuation, an' it 'pears to me if Dick done pledged himself to thet girl, I don't see out of common sense how you going to change it."

Scott fidgeted with his fork, looking thoroughly irritated. It is not pleasant to have one's pet scheme set aside or rudely handled, even by one's dearly beloved.

"I can't see in the name of common sense what you driving at, Louisa—seems you alwus getting side-tracked."

"I'm on the main line. It's you, Si, thet's puffing an' blowing on the side-track."

At this juncture something came into the room, brown and glossy. It seemed uncertain as to welcome, getting across the room with shambling gait. Scott felt a third presence, which, coupled with his wife's clever cornering, somewhat ruffled him.

Rolling his eyes in the direction of the interloper, he motioned with his thumb. The force of the argument was unmistakable.

The bullpup slid around the table and made for the hall door again, with a different idea of sociability.

"Before you git on steam, Louisa, hand up thet dish of apple-sas."

"I bin thenkeng," she remarked, having forwarded

the dish, "if his ententions was fair an' square to Clara Lansing, how in the name of Prov'dence could they hev' bin the same to Maithele?"

As Scott's eyes twinkled with an undeveloped question, she hurried on:

"I only know what I got confidential from Dorothy's aunt, who wormed it out of Maithele."

"Gad, but women jest can——"

"She had to go 'round-about ways for Maithele's good."

"She hed, eh? Wa'al, keep right on; I see Dick's finish—the hull combine's agin' him."

"Ther' you go, Si—alwus siding weth the man."

"Somebody's got to stand by a feller when a whole bunch of females is combined agin' him."

"Mebbe you better hear the evidence. It's curious," she sighed, thinking of Allan, "how a man'll let hes best chanct slip."

"If you don't talk 'tel night, Louisa, I'm attention."

She told the story, unsatisfactorily, perhaps, compared with the correct version.

Aunt Helen's solicitude overstepped the mark—she had "wormed" nothing out of Maithele. Pressed severely, Maithele had candidly admitted the esteem in which she had always held Allan. She laughed gently at Aunt Helen's fears, admitting only that her heart was unchanged. Upon this last point Mrs. Scott rested her opinion.

"A man's got to stick to his honorable ententions—they ain't no way out of that."

Scott was a rather good listener when chippings from his own views were tolerated as punctuations; but he had not introduced so much as a comma during the interesting recital, until her last remark.

"Circumstances alter ententions, Louisa."

"Thet's new on me."

Her head tilted a trifle, and Scott felt slightly under surveillance.

"I was steadfast courting you, Louisa; but, the way I was treated, I might hev' give out an' contracted weth the other girl. Now, will you please tell me, which case would a-bin honorable ententions?"

The problem staggered Mrs. Scott. Something came to her all in a rush. She hesitated a moment before admitting the new thought.

"I hope there wa'n't no truth in Cousin Polly's stat'-ment thet a tow-head widow hed a claim on ye?"

Scott ran his fingers through his iron-gray hair. Mrs. Scott had planted the standard.

"H'm," he said, gaining time, and Louisa's lips set.

"She didn't hev' no perticular cinch on me."

"Was there anything a-tween ye?"

Scott experienced the sensation of uncertain ground.

"There might a-bin a rail fence," he returned, laconically.

"Just what Polly said, an' I wouldn't believe her."

Mrs. Scott was all unnerved.

True love never dies, even when gray hairs and wrinkles send it seemingly into retirement; it will spring forth suddenly when rudely attacked with force and energy—even with youth and beauty—beyond the ken of human understanding.

"I wouldn't a-married you if I'd known," she said, with a catch in her voice.

His eyes fixed upon her with a tender light.

"Ye be the only woman in the world I ever loved; but, Louisa, you did pester me most to death. Mebbe

it's on my conscience thet onct or twict I did look askance at the widow."

He straightened the slightly awkward attitude he had been affecting and sat very erect, his head slightly tilted, which position brought the square jaw into prominence; while something of defiance came into his voice and he brought his big brown fist down upon the table.

"I tell you thes an' mean it: A man's honorable intentions is alwus weth the girl he loves—the other girl ain't wuth shucks; an' if—which I didn't—but I say, if I hed, being riled weth you, courted the widow, made a fool of myself—which I didn't—but if I hed, I'd a-shook the widow in the face of the parson if at the very last minute I caught on thet you was to be hed."

Mrs. Scott revived.

The woman hardly lives who would not have acquiesced as did this one.

"Love is powerful," she said softly. "I guess I'd a-tore her hair out, if she'd a-took, knowingly, what didn't belong to her."

After a moment of silence, in which Scott's mental vision reviewed the hair-pulling situation, he broke into a hearty laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha! I guess you would—ha, ha, ha!—guess you would."

The kitchen door opened and Prudence poked her head into the room, and inquired, in a somewhat weary voice, if she could bring in the custard.

"Custard, did you say? Louisa, you must a-bin thenking of the babies we art of hed. Drop some whisky into mine an' stir it up."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ASSAULT IN THE HILLS.

THE early hours hang heavy in the Vale of Wyoming, and darkness lifts with slow precision as morning's red lamp swings through dreamy dimness unto the highest eastern peak. Then, straightway, meadows' bloom and rivers' flowing catch the erubescence glow.

Back of the mountain heights long strips of mauve and tissue veils of silver lift, revealing mysterious walls of limpid turquoise. And gray mists, hanging low, undulate, scurry, and melt into gold. Then up, up from nests builded in tree top or hung in vine-stripped boulder—flocks of brown-winged creatures flit hither—whither? Across country, east, west—wherever the grain is sown—their brown wings stretching, tip with aureate light, and a russet softness creeps upon the winding road.

A man arrived at the top of Mount Lookout. He had been traveling through the mountains since the break of dawn. Business ended with a railroad official summering up in the vicinity of the great eminence. He urged his horse along.

And the magnificent panorama breaking upon his vision exalted and held him, his eyes following a longitudinal stretch of mountain chaos, dropped in the center of which three cities—Pittston, Wilkes-Barre, Scranton—like etchings in a huge, deep-cut bowl of greenish gold.

He adjusted the lens lightly, renewing the study.

To the right, down the river on the opposite side, a slim, white shaft lifted into the scene—he recognized the monument—wherereposethe bones of slaughtered heroes, and a little to the left of the conglomerate boulder the site of Forty Fort Church. There is no death hour to memory; it lives to the last heart-beat; sometimes it slumbers heavily through the storm of passing events; again, it awakens by the merest breath—the scent of a flower. Always, always young, as we have made it, changeless, a real presence to gladden or sadden remaining days.

On the very spot where he stood many times, in pioneer days, Indians watched the early settler build his fort. And as searchingly as eagle eye ever sought the white man's lodge, Richard Allan sought the abode of his beloved, a dot of white in all that wilderness.

Then, with the naked eye, he regarded the heavens. Long strips of gray, floating into the east, sent hints of amethystine umbrage that discouraged the prophesy of the early hours.

"I must be off," he mused, "out of the hills before the storm. Alas," putting the glasses into the case and swinging the strap over his shoulder, "that dream hours should be so brief."

The moments sped like eagles to their mountain-hilled by mountain-nests, and presently, lengthening shadows fell aslant the river's bank, and dappled amber, resting upon the topmost peak, caught with faint reflection the gathering clouds.

He turned to his horse, tied to a tree near the tangled path, mounted, and rode away through a gloom of leaves.

Just before the broad road at the mountain's base is

reached an opening to the river lends an enchanting view of hill and dale. He drew rein; he might never chance that way again, and this was his day of memories. But, as he was adjusting the field-glass, a shout of boisterous laughter came from the Valley road. The laughter jarred. The times were uncertain, threatening, though no dark or murderous deed had been committed. Owing to the strike situation, a sort of menacing attitude filled the Valley. Rumor had also got abroad that trouble was hatching between the owner of a big mine and a certain gang who had taken upon themselves things not countenanced by the union. A gentleman driving with his little son had been held up the evening before, and Allan fancied he was upon the perpetrators of the deed. Securing his horse, he stealthily crept to the opening, which was some yards away. Nearing the edge, he distinctly heard the name Dale, followed by a harsh laugh and imprecation. He went down upon his knees, crawled to the extreme verge of the incline, and peeped over.

In a sort of recess thirty feet below, formed by the trunks of three great trees that grew by the roadside, four swarthy-looking fellows huddled together, a dark bottle, a hunk of cheese and a generous loaf between them.

The spokesman's hand was upon the bottle. He mumbled, but the words were inaudible. The bottle went round, and the gang was growing hilarious, when a rattling sound attracted the attention of the fellow with the big laugh. He cocked his ear, nodding satisfyingly to the others, who immediately crouched.

Trouble was at hand. Allan slipped the pistol from his hip-pocket and prepared for action. He had the advantage of the rascals, and he felt thankful in his heart, for the sake of the unsuspecting traveler. Pres-

ently the clatter of wheels grew distinctly harsh, and a gypsy caravan turned the bend.

"Git up—hey-ho!" called the driver of the caravan to the gaunt old gray, that sniffed audibly as he struggled along with the heavy burden. A baby face peeped from under the side curtain, and a lad of ten, wearing a battered straw hat and a tattered green jacket, holding with one hand to the driver, switched vigorously with the other the flanks of the weary animal.

They passed, and the fellow with the big laugh rolled upon the ground in an attitude of disgust.

"We no git 'm, we no git 'm."

"Oh, shut!" growled the spokesman, who was not a foreigner. "We will git him—you just wait; our party is on the way."

He drew thirstily from the bottle, steadying himself; then passed it on.

Evidently the four men were desperadoes of the worst type. Allan drew his head back from the brink, carefully turning the situation over in his mind.

If he returned to the fork he could take the short cut to the main road, reach the official's house, get assistance, and return and capture the fellows. The person for whom they waited might not come along so soon. But his reverie was cut short by the spokesman's voice. Allan crawled back to the edge cautiously; the slightest sound, the snapping of a twig, might be his undoing.

A soft brush fringed the edge of the incline, and he had only to bend his head a trifle to see all that was taking place below, the brush forming a kind of bulwark for his protection.

"You mine, boys!"

The group was attention.

"There'll be a rush at Dales. We'll make his picnic hot as he's made ourn."

Allan leaned over the edge; he could not afford to lose a word.

The little man grunted, and the fellow with the laugh echoed the leader's sentiments with a curse. The other swarthy individual tipped the bottle, which elicited a savage outburst from the leader, who, with an ugly imprecation, snatched it from his mouth, held it an instant to the light, sneered contemptuously, turned it upside down, and, disgusted that it had been so completely drained, tossed it into the bushes.

A big laugh applauded the act, and straightway the swarthy individual slunk to his vantage ground—which happened to be the furthest off of the group of trees—and at once ripped out of his brown jeans pocket a dangerous looking knife.

Allan shivered, thinking of his friends and the horror that might be hatching in the brains of the gang.

Guests were always coming and going at the Camp, and he knew that the drive to Mount Lookout was a favorite one. What if Maithale—a party from Dale's——?

His brain whirled.

He glanced carefully about him, then up to the sky, gathering ominous clouds. His animal was growing restless, and the pawing of the dead leaves disturbed the silence. Should the men below catch the sound his chance of rendering assistance to those whom he loved might be futile. He crept back to the horse.

"Good boy," he whispered, "good boy," casting about for an edible, which did not come within his reach. The ground was stubby, tender blades of grass having long since shriveled in the eagerly-early frosts. Gath-

ering a small whisp of copper-gold hay, he fed the grateful creature.

"I haven't had a bite myself," he said understandingly, "since early morning, and I may not——"

He paused abruptly, hearing the distant canter of a horse. The intense silence of the hills, the hard, dry bed of the road made audible the slightest sound. In a flash he had whisked about, heedless in his wild excitement of the noise of dead leaves crunching beneath, his feet.

The rotten branch of a tree hung near the edge; regardless of the act, his hand fell upon it. It snapped— instantly he jumped backward.

But the men below did not hear, so hurriedly were they preparing for the assault. Allan bent forward again, but this time with caution.

"Whist—whist!" hissed the leader, leveling his weapon.

Allan dropped upon one knee, covering the man. The swarthy fellow had a knife, the other two pistols—like-wise the leader, who spoke again:

"Whist, boys! He's coming."

But the cantering ceased, and the leader scowled.

"Hell!"

He twisted his head around; the road was clear; he could see the bend.

"Damnation! If he has turned back I'll drop a bead on you," covering the swarthy fellow.

The others laughed, and one ventured into the road, but turned instantly. A horse was slowly advancing, bearing an ebon rider. Allan's heart stood still. From his elevated position he had a better view than the fellow below. While he gazed the dark mount drew rein, wheeling the animal about. It was Ben.

"Heavenly Father," ejaculated Allan, "my dear Maithela is safe at home!"

Ben doffed his hat as a fine horse approached seating an elderly gentleman of soldierly mien whose figure seemed familiar. The gentleman's hat, being pulled over his brow, defied recognition. But Allan had little time for conjecture.

"Ready!" called the leader of the gang; and Allan's finger fell upon the trigger of his pistol covering the leader, his eyes sharply traveling to the other three.

The game was simple.

The gentleman was the leader's mark, Ben the big man's; the swarthy fellow was to watch; and the fourth ruffian, who stood back of the gang, was evidently prepared to correct the misspent ball.

Ben lagged a trifle behind the gentleman, with the server's etiquette.

Crouching for an advantage, the leader shouted:

"Fire!"

Three sounds rent the air simultaneously. Two bullets were spent, and the third, Allan's, missed the villain's heart, owing to the crouching movement. The leader's right hand fell limp. He turned with an oath to one of his men, whom he thought guilty. Pandemonium reigned. The horses reared and plunged. Another report! The gentleman slashed right and left, but the swarthy brigand had the bridle of his horse.

Allan ran several feet, caught to a stout bough hanging over the edge, and swung himself to the ground. Lighting upon his feet without a scratch, he made directly for the leader's assistant. His unexpected appearance unnerved the Italians, who could not imagine whence he came. But the leader, who was taking in the situation, grasped his pistol in his left hand and

made a dash for Allan—whose hour had surely arrived had not Lady Dee, in a wild effort to escape from the fire, bolted in between the two ruffians, giving Allan the advantage.

Ben had no weapon save the basket of eggs swinging upon his arm. Having espied Allan, his courage lifted, and he hurled the basket of eggs straight at the leader, who, staggering under the splash of white shell, nearly met a horrible end from the hoofs of the mare.

Again two reports rang out, and Allan saw his man totter. Immediately he made his way to the gentleman, who had sprung from his horse as the swarthy fellow's knife entered the animal's throat; and Allan flung himself between the two as the Italian's bloody knife was about to make a lunge. He grasped the knife with his left hand and caught the fellow by the nape of the neck with the right. Lifting him upon his feet, he shook him as a dog shakes a rat. Then he hurled him off with a force that might have broken an ordinary man's bones; but the Italian was slight and wiry and undersized. He barely touched the ground before he was upon his feet again—but at a frightful disadvantage. Allan sneered contemptuously.

"If," he spoke quickly, with chest heaving and eyes afire, "if I cared to soil my hands with a dog's blood, I'd send your miserable carcass——"

The fellow fled, and Allan turned to the gentleman, who had got upon his feet, white and terribly worsted, holding his right arm with his left hand.

"Mr. Lansing!"

But the next moment both men were flying to the rescue of Ben. As they ran, a distance of ten yards, a flash and the whiz of a bullet passed Allan's ear. The ruffians were flying before them, the big man with the

laugh running briskly, the limp body of the little man swung over his shoulder.

The parting shot, intended for Allan, entered the faithful servant's side. Allan caught Ben in his arms, and very gently, with Lansing's assistance, laid him upon the ground. The mare stood perfectly still with intelligent pose, yet quivering in every limb.

Allan started in pursuit.

He was too late! The ground had surely opened and swallowed the gang. Yet he searched diligently. Finally abandoning his determination of pursuit, he fired two shots in the direction of the fugitives to convince them that he had ammunition to spare. He returned to Mr. Lansing and Ben.

Down upon his knees he went, loosening Ben's shirt, dreading yet feeling the necessity of finding the wound.

"She knows," said Allan to Lansing; and Lady Dee, conscious that the remark referred to herself, whinnied, her eyes directly upon Ben.

"Thank Gawd—Mister—All-an—boss."

His eyes closed.

"Are you badly hurt, Ben?"

"'Tain't much—jes' a scratch."

"There is a place about a mile beyond."

"I hardly think, Allan, I could reach it; my horse is finished," said Lansing.

Allan looked up searchingly.

"What! Not hurt, man?"

Lansing's left hand fell upon Allan's shoulder.

"I would have been a corpse but for you. I owe you my life."

"Don't mention it—glad I happened along. But"—looking full upon the other—"that infernal scamp didn't——?"

"I guess he did—stuck his knife," pointing to the arm, "as he tripped me. That arm was gone just as you came up. And," looking intently at Allan, "where in the name of Providence did you come from?"

Allan's glance shot upward.

"I have a horse up there; but, see, we must be off. Those fellows won't return, but we cannot be too sure. Can you mount Lady Dee?"

"I'll try."

But the effort proved too much. Allan mounted, and Lady Dee pointed her ears, picking steps in briery places, taking the big rocks in leaps, and passing the undergrowth in long strides.

And then they were in the road.

"Now, my beauty, now!"

And she sprang forward with a litheness that proved her sire king of the steeplechase.

The spot just above the scene of the assault was gained in less time than Allan had calculated, and as he drew rein astonishment and annoyance grew. Had he taken the wrong cut? Alighting, he led the mare to the cliff and peered over. He had not—there they were—Ben on the flat of his back and Lansing keeping guard. He called softly:

"All right?"

Lansing looked up, nodding.

"I'm coming back; but say, don't get lonesome—I have to go the other way to return."

Lansing's brows knitted, but he did not speak.

Allan's horse was gone, and he explained to himself that the animal might have broken away, alarmed by the shooting. If the rascals had him, then welcome, for, in such event, they would be far away with the prize.

And perhaps, for so it proved—the animal was never discovered.

“Now, Lady Dee, my beauty, we will go up the mountain to the fork, take a short cut, and make a dash for the little brown house where I stopped this morning. Not so fast; wait until we get to the road.”

Lady Dee pricked her ears and snorted.

“Now, my beauty,” leaning forward to pat her neck, “your best, your very best, for the love of Maithela!”

CHAPTER XIX.

HOPE REJUVENATES ALLAN'S HEART.

THRICE the rider sounded the halloo, and the young son of the house came dashing down to the gate. Recognizing Allan, the master followed with quickening pace, calling to his son:

"Lead the mare around to the stable!"

But Allan explained the situation.

"Has it come to this?" said the gentleman. "The difficulty will be to get the wounded man home."

A bewildered shade crossed his countenance, but it was almost instantly dissipated.

"I have it," bringing his hands forcibly together. "You go inside; daughter will give you a bite, and——"

"No, no, thank you; I can't lose a second."

And so they hurried to the stable, and in an incredibly short time were at the gate again. As the daughter threw two big blankets into the wagon the boy came running down the path. He begged to accompany them, and the father, turning to refuse, encountered a youthful soldier, with gun planted and hand saluting.

The boy jumped into the wagon and the daughter handed over a small basket.

"The all-important," she said.

The owner of the wagon handled the reins, and was free with the whip as he plied Allan with questions; and at intervals the boy would strike in:

"Gee whiz! I wish I'd been 'round."

"Yes, you do! Well, son," slightly changing his manner, "things are getting pretty rough, and you may get a taste of the strike before we move to town."

Allan objected.

"I hardly think the union responsible for to-day's affair."

"You on that side?"

"I'm opposed to unions, but don't beat the devil around the stump. The laborer is entitled to——"

"The stump?" cut in the official.

"Where is the devil's stump?" chipped in the boy. The father laughed:

"Behind the anthracite hills."

"I mean," said Allan, "that every fracas in the hills should not be laid at the door of the union fellows."

And Sampson kept pace with his docked companion, notwithstanding the companion's frivolous conduct. Sampson was wise, having gained experience in a rather hard school. He had not nibbled blue grass in the first days of his weaning; he had made out with old stubble. Nor had he been broken in by a beautiful girl with wild, flying hair. He had acquired his learning from a booted young farmer who handled a birch stick in lieu of a crop; he had not been housed in a brownstone stable—he thought himself lucky to rest in a barn. Sampson was trained; Lady Dee was in training. At the end of the first half mile the tripudiary movement of the well-bred young mare nearly unseated the mount, who lost a point about unions of practical worth.

With that satisfaction that gloats when the commoner discovers the slip of the aristocrat, Sampson enjoyed the lesson in deportment the mare received.

"We're most there!" And as the boy spoke they

turned the bend. Allan dashed ahead, and was relieved to find Ben and Lansing in the recess, as he left them.

It was decided to make for the nearest dwelling, although the official declared the distance to his own place not greater; but Allan was anxious to be near town, a physician being the next consideration. Ben was carefully lifted into the wagon, though he stoutly protested, and Mr. Lansing was given a seat beside the small boy.

They had proceeded a little over half the distance when a big drop of rain fell from a black cloud upon the official's nose, and Allan caught one upon the brow. Lansing scowled, glancing upward, and mumbled an imprecation which made the official look slightly askance. But, possibly the boy knew more than his catechism, for, presently an interesting expression played on his countenance and he broke into a shrill whistle.

Allan had fallen back with his own thoughts, permitting Lady Dec to pick her steps and caper in a manner delightful to herself. A second drop, another, still another, and Allan lifted his eyes anxiously.

The road was clear all the way, and every little while vistas opened through gaps in the hills. Against a background of purple and yellow light at the mouth of a conical hollow—one of Nature's great emerald tunnels—his vision beheld the garden of his dreams! He could distinguish the isle of Lechaw-Hanna, like a green cradle bound about with a silver fillet, that curved, fluttered and waved with the breath of the storm.

The wind flapped with giant wings against the inner walls of the conical hollow, and crispy brown leaves flounced gaily into the open, giddy débutants of a season ended. Up, up they whirled; down, down they dropped to fathomless deeps. And the voice long and thin, with the death-screach in it, and the pitiful answer, soft and

low, sighing and sobbing its one-word melody, "woo, woo," swept over the mountains, hung in the valley and died upon the stream. Century-old trees bowed in solemn obeisance; and raiment, fine raiment, stripped in a twinkling from strong branches, was caught in mid-air, whipped into atoms and hurled to eternity. The whole valley was bending and swaying. Again a drop—another, still another! Notwithstanding the anxiety of the hour and the tragedy of the day, Allan experienced a feeling of exhilaration in behalf of his own cause. Hope rejuvenated his spirit—a new resolve lifted his heart with strength like unto the unseen miracle in the storm. The mural marvel of varied greens, by singular mutation agitated into reciprocal wonder, and the whole metamorphosed into bronze and purple—the tunnel darkened, obliterating the picture at its terminus.

"Bless God!" cried Allan, giving Lady Dee her head.

"Bless God!" softly echoed in the storm, and mayhap, floated beyond, through telepathic force, to Maithale waiting with deep anxiety the return of a faithful servant.

The wagon had gone considerably ahead, but Allan was soon within hail.

"Hold up there!" he called, but the wind carried his voice in the opposite direction. Lady Dee was swift; a second time he called, and with satisfaction.

Lansing grumbled, snapping the lid of his watch.

"If you could manage to mount the mare you could get to the farm-house ahead," said Allan.

"Thank you, I prefer to keep by this boy's gun. You go on ahead Allan—get the people to build a fire and have a bed ready. I am played out—played out," he reiterated sententiously.

As they spoke Allan was off, and before he reached the house the rain came down in torrents.

Valley people are always hospitable, and Lansing found the fire waiting and a nice, clean bed. As naturally as though he had just entered the Waldorf-Astoria, he asked for a cocktail. The good man stared. Cognac would answer; the good man grinned.

"Where's the basket?" said the boy.

Allan produced it.

"Sis ain't a white ribbon," said the boy, diving into it; "and this here," producing a brown bottle, "ain't liniment."

"God bless sister," was Allan's pious annotation, as, holding a glass to the light, he measured for Ben before handing it over to Lansing.

When the house was quiet, and the storm passed, Allan took the road to town, not, however, without innumerable commissions from Lansing.

A half hour later the official mounted his animal, having concluded to leave the wagon at the farm-house; and some one wrapped a shawl about the boy's shoulders and lifted him up behind the father.

Allan's run to town was rather hazardous; the road was dark and sloppy, and the last shower, which thoroughly drenched him, overtook him when about half a mile from the house.

Lady Dee plodded on uncertainly; she had proceeded two miles of the way when, halting precipitously, Allan grasped his pistol. But the alarm was unnecessary. A baby lamb came to an untimely end by getting under the animal's hoofs. It had wandered from the fold, perhaps; Allan regretted the accident.

"Shame, shame, Lady Dee—what will your mistress say?" Yet he held himself wholly to blame.

"So much for dreaming," he went on, soliloquizing. "I would give the world to see Maithale to-night, just for a minute, Lady Dee; but we must push on to town. Ah, Lady Dee," still soliloquizing, "you must be more careful next time; think of that little white ball, so innocent, so unsuspecting, lying there in the road crushed beyond resemblance, merely because I dreamed, and you——"

The mare shied.

"Well," laughed Allan, "afraid of your own shadow?" And they sped on, on. At the end of another half mile the mare came to a sudden halt.

"Go on, my beauty!"

But she would not budge.

"Oh- ho!" he cried; "I behold your game!"

He remembered the short cut to the river that he and Maithale had taken one twilight hour of happy memory. Lady Dee was thoroughly acquainted with the route, but as he looked toward the tempting path he sighed.

She clawed the ground, broadening her nostrils, and nickered. Allan coaxed, dug at her ribs, to no avail; and presently she lifted her hind hoofs with antics persuasively interesting, and straightly Allan's course was decided.

With fine satisfaction she turned into the cut, springing nimbly over rock and avoiding bad places. She was familiar with the path and Allan resigned himself to the inevitable.

The two Rice girls from Philadelphia were over again, to remain until after the ball; and all through the week guests were coming and going. The season seemed rushed toward its close. Bonfires glowed in the evening, and the young people danced, flirted, or engaged in games. Lawrence was neglecting business—at least,

three runs to the island the week, not including Sundays, gave the impression. And he constituted himself master of ceremonies over at Bachelor Quarters; Dorothy's dream was sweet fulfilment.

Not so Maithale. The days hung like wet leaves at the river's edge; people disturbed her, and the incessant chatter and merrymaking drove her to the depth of loneliness.

And with sympathetic appreciation Dorothy marked the new quality in the cry of the violin—a singular, irresistible pathos in the fine lifting of notes and a passionate quavering of dying melodies. Playing accompaniments, Dorothy felt herself drifting to the other's mood, and often a tender mist filled her eyes. Then came the days when even the sympathetic friend lay in its box neglected, and she wandered restlessly about. Yet she could dissemble; the face that lifted to the speaker was always bright.

The same day as Richard Allan reached the great apex of Mount Lookout, adjusting the field-glass in the direction of Lechaw-Hanna, Maithale was seated on the long bench in Hammock Court, listening to a new story that Jack Ruford had woven from mere nothings. It is natural to exaggerate favors that are bestowed through gentle kindness. And Ruford rushed to the brink before she could save him. He saw the precipice, too; the awful declivity—yet went down with a certainty.

She retired to her own room, oversad with Ruford's mistake, and wishing, perhaps, she had the strength or inclination to have encouraged him. Seating herself at the window, she anxiously watched the ominous sky.

The prophetic intimations of early noon were hastening to fulfilment; long whiffs of thin air mocked with fine derision the soft lilt of the Susquehanna; tall trees

bent and doubled, and a wee, brown lyrist perched on a limb of the big walnut tree in Hammock Court, hearing his own voice drop to falsetto, flew swiftly to his winter apartment in the big chimney of the left wing of the Camp.

She shivered perceptibly as a great drop—another, and still another splashed at the window pane. Anxiety for Ben deepened as the darkness fell and with it, the downpour of rain. Rain! How it came down—as if some great river bodily lifted to the skies had suddenly upset upon the land.

At last it ceased, ceased with that awful stillness that sends Nature to loneliness.

Presently a rain-bird cawed; the mate answered. The storm was over. And the young moon, rising complacently high, dipped on the edge of a frosted giant plume. An hour, two hours—it seemed like the end of night to Maithale, when suddenly a full voice lifted, filling the stillness.

“A-he-ee-ho! A-he-ee-ho!”

She knew the familiar tone, but could not place it. She rushed down the steps to the broad veranda.

“I must go,” she entreated Lawrence. “I heard the mare whinny, but—but the call was not Ben’s,” she nearly sobbed.

“All right,” said Lawrence, who was doing Dorothy’s bidding; and Pat, swinging the lantern, chipped in:

“Let her hev’ her way, sir. She’ll hev’ it whether or no, if she wants it, sir.”

And down they went to the ferry. And ere it touched the opposite shore they recognized the tall figure standing on the bank holding to the mare.

“Ben with you?” called Lawrence, as the ferry landed. No response.

Maithele did not go forward; he came directly to her, taking both hands in his own.

"I wanted to go straight to town," was the apology.

"Tell me——"; but her voice faltered, and she turned her eyes upon the river running silver ripples against the little boat.

It was the first time they had met since the parting in the church.

"Ben was not able to come on," he answered.

Lawrence laid his hand upon Allan's arm.

"You are soaking wet. You will tell us about Ben when——"

Allan's gaze was fastened upon Maithele.

"If Miss Burton will pardon me, I will speak to you aside."

She interrogated:

"You have told me all?"

"Not all. Ben is hurt—not seriously, I hope—we will pull him through."

Allan and Lawrence walked up the bank.

"I cannot see her suffer," were Allan's first words.

"I would not have ventured here, but the case is desperate."

When the story of the assault was told, and they were returning, Lawrence vouchsafed to pay an honest score.

"You are a gentleman, Richard Allan, but I did not know until to-night that you are also a hero."

The other smiled feebly.

"Don't put it that way."

"Dorothy," continued Lawrence, "will never forgive me if you do not cross over; why, man, you are wet through and through!"

He looked his friend over and proceeded:

"You have her sympathy—she will be glad to see you;

with your permission, I told her all, and I repeat, you have her sympathy."

But Allan was decided.

"I have clothes at the hotel. I will get into them, find the best doctor in town and get back to the farmhouse before midnight."

"That settles it; I am with you."

"Good. But first take her back—tell the news to Dale, and hurry."

Lawrence gave the order, and the ferry pushed out. The man on the bank lifted his hat without a word; and Maithele, one arm caressing Lady Dee, turned her face to him. He could not see the eyes brimming with tears.

Allan did not find the wait long.

Pat had done what he called "fire-engine work." The gray came over with the yellow phaeton, in which some one had thrown the necessary things, and Mr. Dale accompanied the two as far as town. His business was with the chief of police. He would not return to the island that night, he said. There were men enough there to protect the women.

Lawrence found the doctor; and Allan was waiting when he returned to the hotel. And, with a crack of the whip, the grays started briskly for the mountain road.

CHAPTER XX.

"I HAVE YOU BOTH IN A TRAP."

BEFORE mid-hour the following day the four men drove off.

Lansing's injuries were slight; but he looked the invalid, received all possible attention, and accepted the doctor's suggestion to remain over at his private sanatorium in town.

It was otherwise with Ben. The doctor probed, found the ball, but his case was nearly hopeless.

Driving townward, the conversation turned upon the event that brought about Ben's undoing.

"Who is he?" inquired Lansing.

"Ben is a fine specimen of the dark element of Kentucky soil. His history is interesting."

And Allan related as much of it as he deemed necessary to the occasion.

"I called to him," said Lansing, when Allan came to the end; "it was so odd, you know, to see a black face in the hills. He drew rein and waited for me to catch up. I don't suppose those scoundrels would have molested him had he gone on alone; they were waiting for me."

"You have a clue, Mr. Lansing?"

Lansing flushed, stammered.

"No, no—only I don't think I will venture again through the wilderness without a guard."

No one vouchsafed a reply, but Allan felt confident that the highwaymen were thoroughly cognizant of Lansing's coming—and besides, that he had considerable money on his person.

Several years later Allan obtained information that explained Lansing's journey in the hills. It developed that much of the gentleman's wealth had been acquired by foreclosing mortgages, not always properly recorded, making extraordinary loans, the anomalous interest payable and not extended beyond a given time. The means to the end, always niggardly, often required Lansing's personal supervision. He was upon an errand of this kind when set upon by the gang, who did not scruple, perhaps, to get even.

Two months later a tall fellow, whom Allan identified as the leader, was given a life sentence for a similar charge. The fellow claimed friends in the union, but the friends stoutly repudiated him.

Returning to New York several days later, Mr. Lansing at once telephoned to the office of a leading journal, giving a graphic and stirring account of the assault, incidentally mentioning that the brave rescuer was the affianced of his niece. This was the thing Allan hoped to avert, and as he boarded the train at his own town for the city the following morning he fervently prayed that he might, through money and influence, manage to keep his name out of the affair—at all events, at least so far as the connection with Clara Lansing was concerned.

He bought a paper, and just as he proceeded to read his attention was attracted by the rustle of femininity. Directly in front of him sat a young woman whom he had not seen in months. She was a charming person, bright and vivacious, and he could not resist the tempta-

tion of her smile, which invited him to the seat beside herself. So the run to the city was passed without a second glance at the paper.

Having telegraphed Miss Lansing, Allan repaired at once to the residence.

He was ushered into the library, a cosy nook in the east wing of the mansion.

A small fire burned in the grate; the weather was delightful outside; the fire was merely to impart cheeriness, but he found the room oppressive and moved over to the window. He was disappointed that Mr. Lansing was not at home; the gentleman had called a hansom, he was informed, and gone to the Street. And so he amused himself arranging his ideas. He would tell Clara Lansing the plan he had devised to avoid notoriety. Smiling with satisfaction, he ensconced himself in a big chair.

At least he had a card worth playing, and he hoped to play it with admirable skill.

He reviewed the whole situation while he waited—the other interviews between Clara and himself, the parting in the church with his dear Maithele, the tragedy in the hills and the meeting on the ferry.

Then his mind dwelt upon the marvel that had come to him, opening the way.

Clara Lansing had reminded him on the other occasion of his debt of gratitude. Indeed, he had been mindful of it long after the debt had been paid—his magnanimous spirit esteemed the virtue of gratitude eminently above its commercial face; he did not consider the return with interest equivalent to a full erasure of the debt. Sentiment could only be met by sentiment. He felt himself acquitted, having saved John R. Lansing's life at the risk of his own. Had not Mr. Lansing

broadly admitted as much? The act had canceled the obligation.

Allan smiled with satisfaction—he could afford to smile—and his heart lifted with the happiness of approaching freedom as Clara Lansing appeared in the doorway. Clara Lansing was always well gowned; but the present morning effect, with its slight suggestion of negligence, and the jacquemint bud in the candré hair, rather overshot the mark.

Allan observed, with the swift comment of passing reflection, that the red gown was an off shade of the flower, as, extending his hand warmly, he inquired after her own health. Possibly she looked for a more ardent greeting, for his next interrogation—which included solicitude for Mr. Lansing—was answered with a toss of the head.

He found her a comfortable seat. He was always courteous, but the young woman declared the chair “stuffy” and immediately changed to the tête-à-tête, persuasively, perhaps.

Allan miscalculated. He did not feel entitled to the charge of heroism, but he did expect the one thing that seemed farthest from her thought—the acknowledgment and commendation of his conduct in behalf of her uncle.

Her conversation was indifferent, remote from the subject, and presently it flagged.

“I am lazy,” she remarked with an arch smile; “will you join me?”

She touched the tiny button.

“Tea or coffee?” she inquired of Allan.

“Neither, thank you.”

“Sherry,” to the person standing in the doorway.

“You need not have troubled,” spoke Allan.

"You will at least care to be sociable. I came in just before the 'wee sma' hours,' and haven't had a bite for the longest while. Really, I had just dropped into a doze when your telegram came."

He was staring incomprehensively as she hurried on.

"A telegram is the one thing that demoralizes this household. Uncle had me awakened." She paused an instant, putting her fingers to her mouth to hide drowsiness. "He got off before I had a chance to scold."

"I am sorry. And I have called at an unseemly hour?"

"No, really; but my humor will improve when I get a bite."

A dainty repast was set before Clara Lansing, and upon a small onyx table at Allan's right the butler placed a crystal decanter and a single glass.

Allan altered his opinion, filling the glass. She had been away from home, and in all probability had not heard of the assault in the hills.

As she carved off the wing of a plump quail he lifted his glass.

"Your health, young lady, which hardly needs a toast."

A blush suffused her cheeks, deepening the rouge a trifle as he questioned:

"You have been away visiting?"

"No."

"In the city?"

"No."

"Supper?"

"No."

"Dance?"

"Sure."

Monosyllables were in order.

She sipped the tea with a gold spoon.

"I don't mind if you smoke," putting the spoon aside and lifting the cup to her lips.

He lighted a cigar.

"I hope when we're married you'll not care to breakfast earlier than ten."

Allan winced. The silliness of the remark did not strike him, but the reference to the occasion.

"Twelve is my lunch hour; I am through a half day's work by midday."

"Oh," she spuriously ventured, "you have? But you will make concessions."

She looked directly at him. Not for the first time in their long acquaintance she marked the strength of Allan's face, the masterful cut of the jaw and the positive curve of the upper lip. The nose was a prominent feature, well shaped and strong; and the high brow from which the hair slightly waved left the temples bare.

He was sending filmy clouds to the ceiling, and missed her scrutiny.

She waited, and he, regarding the weed, lowered it to the silver ash tray, which stood near his glass. Touching off the ashes and disregarding her question, he inquired:

"You were at a dance last night?"

"Yes; never enjoyed myself more."

He smiled, making conversation.

"I did not know that the season had begun."

"It has not; quiet affair."

"I am glad that Mr. Lansing did not need your services?"

"You refer to that scratch on his arm? He actually compelled me to see it! I should hardly give up a dance for a trifle."

Allan sent a last cloud to the ceiling.

Plainly she meant to avoid or to make light of the occasion.

"He had a narrow escape," ventured Allan, probing.

"Oh, he is always having something."

Allan's brows contracted. Lansing evidently had made light of the affair; but he could not afford to throw to the winds the card he had come the distance to play.

"Ben, you know, is in bad shape. I am afraid——"

"Yes, uncle told me. I remember him—an officious black fellow that girl brought up here."

"A noble soul who followed Miss Burton east," he corrected.

Again the head tossed.

Clara Lansing held the trump card; she would make no concessions.

"I simply despise Southern women. I never met one who didn't go slopping around with one of her former slaves."

"Your education has been neglected; your language is unbecoming."

She touched the button. Neither spoke until the tray disappeared; then she rose, walked to the door, closed it.

"Sha'n't we ever be through with the disagreeable?" Her voice and manner were suddenly quiet.

"At once," he answered, in the same tone.

Her eyes fell upon Allan curiously, searchingly, with a sort of mental calculation.

He knocked the ashes from his cigar and laid it nicely upon the ash tray, moved the table a trifle, leaned back in his chair, meeting Clara Lansing's gaze.

"You referred on a previous occasion to my obligation to your uncle."

"And you informed me the obligation had been canceled."

"Exactly. I felt then, as I feel now: An obligation of that kind may be canceled; but gratitude, the sentiment, may only be met by a like return."

He looked kindly upon her as he went on:

"Clara, the whole debt is thoroughly erased. A few days ago it was my good fortune to be about when needed. I saved your uncle's life."

Her brows contracted and the mouth drooped at the corners contemptuously as she responded:

"And proved yourself a fool. Why didn't you let the old thing die? I would have gotten his money, and——"

Allan threw his hands forward as if warding off a blow, but she went on, beside herself with rage:

"And perhaps made it hot for you and that silly girl that—that don't know how to do anything but fiddle—and that only half well."

Instantly he was upon his feet, disgust depicted in his every lineament.

He walked over to the window—looked out upon the street. Was this the woman he had known for years?

He had never loved her; he had tried to break with her. He felt that her former execrable conduct, lacking in womanly principle and dignity, was in a measure pardonable; but the present apathy, disregard, the bold unfeeling he could not conciliate. Turning sharply from the window, a firm resolve possessed him.

She was leaning against the mantel—not dejectedly, but reflectively—a cold smile upon her lips.

"I will never," he said, "never marry a woman who could express herself so inhumanly regarding the being to whom she owes everything."

She laughed, and, the sound jarring, he added, deliberately:

"Miss Lansing, our engagement is off."

The laughter ceased, and he repeated:

"Understand, please, the engagement is off."

"Richard Allan, I owe my uncle nothing. He selected me from the lot"—referring to her sisters—"because I suited him. I did not specially care to be selected. As to the engagement, I regret to tell you——" She smiled sententiously.

"If the cards are out, it makes no difference; I say——"

"Don't say anything, please," touching the button, "until you learn why I cannot oblige you."

To the attendant she gave an order.

As Allan paced up and down the room he heard the passing of feet above, the opening and closing of a door.

Then Clara Lansing had the paper.

"I do not care to see it," he said.

But she held it to the light and read, in a disturbing tone:

"Assault on John R. Lansing in the Pennsylvania hills. Mr. Richard Allan, betrothed of Miss Clara Lansing, to the rescue."

Allan winced.

"Even so, I will have a correction in every paper in town by evening."

She laughed.

"What could you say?"

He made no response, and she proceeded: "It is rather interesting, as such things go. I will read it."

He moved over to the door, his hand upon the knob. He was determined not to hear. She laughed again, throwing the paper aside. Her card was not yet played.

"You will keep your engagement with me. If you think for a moment I care for you, you are mistaken; I hate you! I have hated you since—since I saw that girl."

She was standing before him, too florid, perhaps, for candré hair. And the rose, having lost its balance, lay crushed, annihilated beneath her own slipper.

"I am not thinking of you," she continued, "but of myself. I shall not loom up in the world's eyes as a jilted one."

"I will save you from that."

"You!" she echoed with scorn. "I have my opinion of what you would do in my behalf. Anyway, your favors come too late; the cards are out."

"By what authority, please? I protest. I shall appeal to Mr. Lansing."

She came very near, almost hissing into his ear:

"Make the best of it. What is marriage, anyway, but a silly ceremony?"

His voice had a commanding ring as he sent forth:

"Drop the subject. You have no regard for anything, it seems. I will wait Mr. Lansing's return."

"If you dare!" with menacing voice and attitude, "I will appeal in my own behalf."

"I am perfectly willing that you should," he said, more kindly.

"Are you?"

Her fingers clinched. The trump card was flung upon the board.

"If you dare, Richard Allan; if you dare, mark me! I will tell him that——"

"Tell him what you please."

"That——" She leaned forward and whispered into his ear.

Allan turned white to the lips.

"You are mad—mad—go to your room, girl; your brain is deranged!"

"I will say it," she repeated, "and my uncle will kill you. I will swear that it is true."

She laughed hysterically and struck out in a higher key:

"I will have the satisfaction of seeing you suffer."

Allan flung himself into a chair, snapped his fingers lightly. But almost instantly he was upon his feet, again facing her.

"Bah! You would not be guilty of such a falsehood—anything so base, so degrading."

"I will tell him." She decided firmly and without a blush.

Allan hesitated before responding.

"If that is your style I will permit you to proceed. I would sooner get the bullet than be forced into a marriage with——"

Allan was a gentleman.

"I understand," she smiled, filling in the gap. "You have other plans; but you will keep your engagement with myself." She arched her brows, and her words fell contemptuously: "Your movements will be watched."

"Beware, young lady; you are carrying your game too far."

She passed the interruption.

"If you run abroad, for example?"

His gaze shot keenly in the direction of the desperate woman.

"You will sue me for breach of promise?" he ventured, a joyous thought filling his mind. But with her first word hope died.

"Not much."

"What then?"

"I will kill or defame that girl."

Allan glowered.

"You could not find a charge against her, and I warn you——"

"I could not?"

Clara Lansing laughed—laughed. Presently, leaning forward:

"I have you both in a trap. Why did she remain behind at that lonely old church of Forty Fort, and why were you hiding at the side of the church until the party had gone? I can prove you were alone with her in the church over an hour!"

Allan was a strong man, mentally, morally and physically; but he shrunk visibly as he answered:

"That does not concern you, and please be careful."

"It does and shall concern me, and you be careful."

"Bah!"

Allan turned to the window that she might not see the effect of her words. But she knew—dropping easily into a chair to await his next move.

Had his heart been in condition for prayer, he might undoubtedly have prayed heaven to spare him another sight of Clara Lansing's face; but he was stunned almost leaden with the perfidy of the woman before him. He did not doubt that she would act. The direct blow that threatened Maithele's life had not seemed so horrible as the opprobrious, roundabout aspersion. He did not have to rack his brain to locate the informant. He remembered the creak of the church door, the red jacket and the flying horse. In justice to Miss Rice, he did not charge her gossiping with calumny intended, but her mischievous prattle had pro-

duced a dangerous weapon that Clara Lansing might use as a charge of crime.

All at once he felt an overwhelming sense of duty to the young girl whose life and honor were in jeopardy because of himself, and he determined to save her—cost what it might. He had arrived at this conclusion as a hansom approached, and several moments later he heard the click of the entrance door; another moment and Lansing was in the library.

Without noticing his niece, Lansing threw a bundle of papers upon the writing table.

“Mr. Lansing!”

“Why, mighty, mighty glad,” shaking Allan’s hand. “Just the man I’m looking for; want to show you something, it is in the latest edition, just out.” As he spoke he turned the leaves of the paper.

“But I have an engagement, I am hurrying off.”

Lansing objected.

“But you must remain Allan.”

“Mr. Lansing, I have a favor to ask,” hesitatingly.

“Favor? Now, you just ask the big one of me; I’ll grant it. Fire away!”

He hesitated—lost! Possibly had he struck boldly ahead, defied the woman, disregarded her threats, he might have won, but the thought of Maithele! One word might be enough for the woman who stood between himself and Lansing, like a lioness ready for the awful lunge. He could only crawl to his point and observe her attitude.

“It’s about this affair—between Miss Lansing and myself—I appeal to you as a gentleman——”

Her hand fell heavily upon his arm.

“I also appeal to you,” she said firmly.

Lansing looked from one to the other, fear, doubt, silencing his tongue.

And Allan instantly decided his loss—sacrifice—self-renunciation for the honor of the girl he loved.

“We have quarreled,” he said, “over the wedding cards.”

Lansing sighed his relief. A quarrel could be bridged over.

“Ha, ha, a quarrel! And I am to be arbitrator?”

“I think I should have something to say about the arrangement of my own wedding,” said Allan.

“You should, indeed; I agree with you.” Lansing breathed freely.

“Well, if the ceremony takes place”—the grasp on his arm grew more tense—“the favor I ask Mr. Lansing is, that the affair be extremely quiet.”

“Sure, sure.” Lansing looked his disappointment.

“And for business reasons,” Allan concluded, “the date must be changed.”

“The cards are engraved, uncle; it will be impossible.”

“Have you issued them?”

She did not dare to make a false statement. She feared her uncle, or rather his wrath that might deprive her, with hardly due notice, of his vast wealth.

“If you please, answer me?”

“They are not out,” she said sullenly.

“Throw them into the fire.”

He slapped Allan on the back.

“Anything more?”

“If you please.”

It was the supreme moment.

Clara Lansing understood, and again her hand rested heavily upon his arm.

"Then let it be distinctly understood, Mr. Lansing, I fix the date of my own wedding."

Lansing's face fell. He was a shrewd old gentleman, a nervous quantity of cold flint. It was, indeed, a quarrel; he felt the atmosphere, and he decided to straighten matters by direct entreaty.

"As to that, of course, you would not put a slight upon my niece. So much has been written and said of the affair I would not care to—to postpone the date. I would prefer, as the wedding is to be extremely quiet and so on, that it take place, unless you can advance a good excuse—for our friends, you know, are to be considered—it should take place as soon as possible."

Clara Lansing smiled. Half a victory is better than defeat.

"Your arm?" inquired Allan solicitously, avoiding the appeal.

"Oh, it is getting on nicely. Wish I could sue for damages."

Allan moved over to the door, but Clara Lansing followed him.

"Will you kindly fix the date of the wedding before leaving the house?" she said icily, and, in a whisper, "If it costs my soul I will defame that girl. I will speak out if you leave the house without fixing the date."

Allan stood two minutes with his hand upon the door-knob, and then fumbling with papers in the side pocket of his coat, took out one and examined it, gaining time. Finally he walked over to the table where Lansing was standing, and he gave a date—one week earlier than the date of Dorothy's ball.

He left the house. He had seen Clara Lansing in full illumination.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DEAD MAN'S LIFE WAS AN EXAMPLE.

THE days dragged in the mountains. Sometimes the patient seemed better, again his condition seemed unchanged.

Mrs. Scott often remained over night and Maithale utilized much of the time in journeys to and from the island.

The air was fine, invigorating, and regretting only that to please Aunt Helen, she had left Lady Dee in the stable, she reclined among the cushions of the yellow phaeton and gave herself up to reverie.

True love is the river of the soul, and its loftiest aim, its highest purpose, is simply to bear the burden of its own song. Like a zephyr, kind thought ripples the stream or lifts its melody upon happy pinions, thus helping to forgetfulness, or leading safely over the arid wastes that block out miles of the beautiful way.

Fortunately Maithale had never learned in that certain school of the world that regards love as a transaction, binding in faithfulness by a law inexorable and cold and having no sympathetic connection with spirit or ideal principle. Where love had gone so willingly it would remain forever.

There are natural rights not easily set aside. She did not determine to obliterate Allan's memory; there was no need. Besides it is not possible to turn the current of a natural channel into contrary ways. Her thoughts flew

swift as wings to days happy, because of the warmth of reciprocal affection. And the exquisite joys of those days were not banished if rudely shaken.

She was returning to Ben, having spent several hours on the island, and, as the grays sped along the beautiful road, her thoughts reverted to Richard Allan. The gentleman at the same hour was returning from New York, having spent an unhappy time, as related, with Clara Lansing. Could Maithale have beheld his countenance, could she have followed him into his private office, could she have seen him when the door was secure—wearied, dejected, completely prostrated and hopeless, her tender dreaming might have reached a more disturbing end.

Maithale arrived at the farm-house. Ben's condition had not improved, and, consulting with the good woman, she learned that a change for the worse had taken place soon after her departure in the morning. She remained with him almost an hour and then went outside where Pat waited. And as she delivered the sad intelligence, she observed the doctor hacking chunks of bitter-sweet with proprietary nonchalance. The bitter-sweet hung recklessly over the fence to the roadside, a gold-dotted green fringe for the wall of hollyhocks, that tall and strong, grew on the inner side. No one objected to the doctor's audacious stripping of the exquisite adornings of an humble home. Doctors have privileges and conscience in the matter of appropriating is not always defined. Maithale did not object to the privilege, but to the action, which, under the sad circumstances, seemed frivolous. She walked up and down the little porch—went inside—came out again with paper and pencil. She sat down upon the wooden steps and wrote on a slip of paper and proceeded down the path.

“You will not loiter by the wayside.”

She addressed Pat.

"Now listen to that? Shure, I had me orders to come back straight as the roads would permit and I says, says I, 'I will.' I do what I'm told, miss, and besides I'm not overjoyed to travel in these parts, after hearing of the late encounter."

"I hardly think there will be a repetition of that affair. You were armed when you brought me through?"

He shook his head.

"Miss Dorothy gave me wan of them small guns. I left it back in the stable; I never tech them things; I wouldn't know which end was foremost."

Maithale was watching the doctor, who had fastened a pink hollyhock upon the lapel of his coat and she missed Pat's witticism.

"Don't loiter," she repeated, and she handed over a telegram. "You will please not lose a moment in delivering this."

Finding a silver wheel in his hand Pat grinned, slipping it into his boot. He lifted his hat.

"They be thrying as gals," he said, as the grays sped down the road, "but for politicians they can't be beat; they rubs everything into a body with the glue."

Maithale watched the buggy disappear around the curve. The farmer's good wife was busy in the kitchen and her man was in the field, cutting and binding wheat. Phyllis, the one child, a girl of ten, was watching the patient's restless slumber.

It had come so swiftly, the last blow. True, the doctor had given little hope from the first, owing to the patient's advanced age, but Ben had been so cheery, she had hoped, had felt confident, in fact, of his recovery.

Why, as she thought about it, only two days ago he had chatted with her almost an hour without fatigue. And

now he was going. She was glad, glad that she had been able to remain near him in the last days. Did she owe him nothing? Born in slavery, he had remained faithful after emancipation. What greater proof could he give of his love for her people? When her mother died with an infectious fever, she remembered how all the servants had deserted—all save Ben. When her brother was drowned, it was Ben who formed the crew that dragged the lake, where they were summering, that awful lake, for the body; it was Ben who brought him home in his arms—God bless him! And when the last crushing blow came—ah, how well she remembered!

Ben talked of the old days during his illness, but Allan seemed to occupy his thoughts most of the time. Allan's fighting ability, his bravery, stirred Ben almost to eloquence and Maithale listened with deepening cheeks and shining eyes. Ben knew nothing of Allan's engagement to Clara Lansing. He had heard Allan's endearing words to Maithale one night as she and Allan strolled in the moonlight.

Maithale had nearly broken down—the change for the worse that had come over Ben since morning, was so great. He smiled weakly:

"Don't you mind none, Miss Maithale, I couldn't a held out much longer, no how. No, I got to go. I ain't sorry. I ben hangin' 'round too long as it is." After a slight panting for breath he resumed. "I—I done square by you, honey?"

She could not speak, but bowed her head affirmatively.

"Bless God, I'll see my Boss, I'll see my Heavenly Father."

He was quiet again; then raising his head, his eyes roamed around the room.

"I has got something to say; in my trunk is a small

tin box; it's yours, an' all that's in it. You has only to do weth it is you see fit. I want that box this day. I never put my money in no bank," he went on; "the little interest ye git ain't equal to the loss of the capital when the bank fails, an' they mostly do. So I jes' kep' it, carried it about, an' it's ben a heap of trouble."

"I am sure Ben, I will do what is right with the money, but you must not talk——"

"Oh, I ain't got much more to say; but it's on my mind an' I can't rest."

He closed his eyes. When he spoke again his voice seemed stronger.

"Your pa said I was to be put in the family tomb when I died."

"Yes, Ben."

His head swayed from side to side.

"It's too far. It took so long to come way up here, I'm feared my body would never git back. I've studded it out. Your heart's sot in the North, honey, an' I know if I get a green spot hereabouts my spirit'll be apt to follow you sometimes."

She could only say—"Yes, Ben."

"That's all, honey, except——?"

"Except?"

"I feel as if I couldn't die peaceful, 'ceptin' I see Mr. Allan, boss——"

Maithele's heart stood still. This request was unforeseen; she nearly gasped. Send for Allan! How could she? She did not respond at once.

"I know he'll come."

She did not dare to keep Ben in suspense.

"Yes, yes, Ben, I will," she said finally.

He closed his eyes peacefully and presently she saw

that he was sleeping. It was then that she went outside, worded the telegram and sent Pat off with it.

She did not consider what Allan might think. She felt perfectly sure he would understand. At all events she had no choice in the matter. It was her duty to further the simple, dying request of her faithful servant. Naturally she was disturbed, dreading the meeting.

He would hardly get there before the following day, she decided, and if Ben rested easy, she would drive to see that nice girl—the official's daughter who had been so very kind, and thus avoid meeting Allan. She did not realize how rapidly Ben's end was approaching.

Night arrived, no word from the island and Ben grew desperately worse. In fact when the doctor returned he went at once to work. Removing a glass bowl of fresh-cut flowers from the small table beside the patient's bed, he made a quick examination; it was the last.

"No need," he said, summoning Maithale; "he may live until morning."

And when the good woman insisted, she refused to leave Ben.

"No," she said, sweetly, "when my father was ill for weeks, Ben slept on a pallet by the door."

"Good soul!" said the woman, turning away.

Maithale crossed the narrow passageway leading to a very small room that had been assigned her. Opening a leather case, she arranged a few things orderly upon a small table that had a square mirror hanging above it. She loosened her hair; it fell below the waist line, a mass of ringlets, dark in the twilight of the room.

The flat wick of the ungainly lamp burned low. She parted her hair nicely, braided and fastened the ends with narrow white ribbon; then removed the band from

her throat, turning in a trifle the neck of the waist she wore.

The family were assembled, all save Phyllis, who had retired after supper.

The good woman was conversing with her husband, trying to keep him from sleep, but his case was hopeless and every now and then he would doze off. He might not have heard the distant sound of approaching wheels had not the wife dug him in the ribs as gently as she knew how.

He got up with a yawn and stretched his brawny arms. The vehicle stopped and the man took himself lazily to the door.

"Halloo!" came from the road.

"Halloo!" he answered.

"Shall we drive round?"

"You had better," from the door, " 'less yer want to stay out over night."

The man jumped out of the vehicle and opened the gate and came briskly up the path. The other drove around to the stable.

"Mr. Allan, boss," murmured Ben feebly, and Maithale whirled the long braids hastily, securing the knot with a long shell pin, as a light tap announced the visitor.

"I did not lose a moment," bowing over her extended hand. "I am glad the message came."

She thanked him, avoiding his eyes, and he crossed the room.

"Well, Ben, I'm here, and I'm glad to be here."

"Yes, Mr. Allan, boss. Thank Gawd, I can die in peace now."

Maithale slipped out of the room, running against Lawrence in the dim hallway, and he led her to a seat by a table, raising the lamp-wick a trifle.

"I must tell you," he began at once, "Mr. Dale is ill. He arrived at the island just after you left. I am substitute."

"A kind substitute," but her eyes beseeched him.

And Lawrence explained that Mr. Dale's illness might confine him to the house a day or two.

"Aunt Helen and Dorothy?" she inquired.

"Are with him. But they are nearly wild about you; so I came to assure them that you were all right." He told her how it chanced that Allan had come so quickly. "I had the good luck to be at the telegraph office when Pat arrived; he handed over the telegram to me and I called Dick on the long distance—read your message to him."

"You always do the right thing."

Maithele did not need persuasion; she went at once to her room. Lawrence promised to summon her should the end arrive.

She did not try to sleep, or even think of so doing. She dropped into an uncomfortable high-back rocker, propping her feet against the rungs of an opposite chair. A funny little window faced her diagonally, and she leaned forward, gazing through the small thin panes of glass. Moonlight silvered the whole rugged scene, and stars were few and far, the soft effulgence recalling another night of sacred memory. In the room across the hall, was the man to whom she had plighted her troth and, swiftly passing to the great tribunal, the one witness. Not that she or the man required the witness; both would have gloried in the confession had it not been for the unfortunate entanglement.

With death upon the doorstep, a weird, uncanny feeling gets into the air, and strange, mysterious whisper-

ings, like voices from the occult, wing imagination with arrow flights to limitless bounds.

Maithela heard the hoot of the night bird, saw the wind ghosts dancing by and felt the touch of the unseen.

The last link connecting her with the old life was about to snap. A tremor shook her frame, and she pressed her lips, one against the other, to keep back the pain. Oh, the loneliness of night! One, two hours she waited, waited. Not a sound within the little house. The room had grown cold; she felt it, and drew a light shawl about her shoulders. Her head inclined forward; one hand tightly pressed, rested under her chin, the elbow upon the arm of the chair.

Drowsiness comes so ingratiatingly, she did not realize the mastery of sleep; the eyelids drooped, the night-vision fluctuated, hung, dropped to oblivion.

The blessing of forgetfulness is a precious boon—a merciful stop-over in the awful rush—of the active brain. Yet dreams came to an end—startling sometimes, and crushing often enough. Her eyes opened, opened wide; the scene without was as she left it before drowsiness came, and, with brave resolve, she tried to imagine green hills and sunshine through the little panes of glass; to recall the picture as she remembered it in the bright day. But the moonlight had the landscape folded in a shroud and winds were calling softly for the wraiths to advance. As she gazed, pell-mell, down the hills they flew, long thin ghosts; up, up the hills they scurried. She watched their reckless course with irresistible fascination.

But the dance of ghouls is an uncanny dance and she was turning away from spectral night as something rapped lightly with metallic knuckles. Startled and quivering, she drew back, but something compelled her gaze; with eyes staring stonily she saw a long, slim finger

draw a death's-head upon the glass window pane. The blood, cold in her veins, rushed to her heart, nearly checking its beat forever. She was all unstrung; it was only the midnight breeze heedlessly tossing a frost-pinched leaf against the pane.

And then reality spoke—spoke with the awful voice in the presence of which imagination is—nothing.

She heard a firm step cross the hall, pause at the door, knock.

“Miss Burton?”

“Yes.”

“He wishes to say good-by.”

The step retreated down the passage, knocked softly at another door and Lawrence's kind voice:

“Will you please arise? I have just called the young lady. The man is dying.”

Smothering a sob, Maithale hurried across the hall.

Ben's eyes were closed as Maithale entered the room, and Allan sat at the side of the couch with averted face.

Lawrence was mixing something in a glass. Into the mixture he dipped a thin, white cloth, and bending over Ben, moistened the lips. The patient revived, opening his eyes upon Maithale and Allan seated opposite each other. He did not speak, but a smile flitted across his mouth and his eyes closed. The woman came into the room. She bustled about after the manner of her kind, and spoke to Lawrence, who followed her outside.

She explained that her man would sleep on yet a while as he had a hard day's work ahead of him. If Lawrence would kindly assist her, she would get a fire started in the kitchen. And Lawrence, whose ability in that line had never been thoroughly tested, followed the good woman into the kitchen.

Ben's eyes shone with intelligence. The tin box Law-

rence brought was in his hand. He handed it to Maithale.

"It's yours, honey. I'm givin' it 'fore I goes, so that the law can't git a dispute over it."

"Oh, Ben; please don't," said the girl, putting the box aside.

"It's for you, an' all thet 's in it is for you." His eyes rolled over to Allan.

"Air you witness—Mr. Allan, boss?"

"I am witness, Ben."

"Do not talk, it—it hurts you."

Maithale spoke with uncertain voice. Ben interrupted.

"I'm goin', honey," he paused, "an' I'm blessin' the—Lord—as I goes. He has been good to me—an'—an'—I'll see Him—and He'll see me."

Maithale stroked the thin hand upon the coverlet, and Allan rested his eyes upon her.

The silence of the room was broken only by the breathing of the patient.

Allan noticed the nervous tugging at the coverlet and drew it up a trifle to assist him, but Ben's fingers fidgeting found the hand and held it.

"It's the way of the Lord, an' I am thanking Him for His ways."

He managed to place Allan's hand upon Maithale's and, trembling, she tried to disengage it, but he detained it gently. She did not look up until Ben spoke again. His breathing almost ceased; then the lips moved as both of his hands fell upon the clasped hands of the two. Ben's eyes rolled heavenward.

"Bless these children—Lord—bless the path they goin' trod together—bless——"

His voice failed and his mind wandered, "Children,"

the lips murmured, and again, almost indistinguishable, "grand-children—Amen!"

They thought he was gone, and with brave self-forgetfulness, their eyes turned to him. He did not speak again, and Allan managed by a gentle motion to lift the dying one's hands, at the same moment bending forward to press a fervent kiss upon the hand slipping from imprisonment.

Maithale buried her face in the coverlet, and in so doing the long pin that fastened the heavy braids fell to the floor.

When Lawrence opened the door five minutes later, the two were sitting opposite each other as he had left them.

Allan spoke in a whisper. She obeyed.

"Rest and compose yourself," added Lawrence kindly; "you will not be disturbed again."

He left her at her door and the good woman brought a cup of hot coffee which she sipped and was grateful.

About eight o'clock the following morning the yellow phaeton and the grays stood at the door; Dorothy had come for Maithale. The two men reached the Camp a quarter after five. Mr. Dale was not disturbed, as Lawrence and Allan had taken the arrangement of affairs entirely upon themselves.

The small corner at the end of the farm, the man and woman would not sell—it was offered with good-will. And so at the proper hour Ben was given the generous measure of sod Nature allots to every earth-child.

Maithale had returned when arrangements were completed. She was accompanied by Dorothy, bearing a great wreath of roses.

It was only a little way to go, across the field of stacked

wheat to the big walnut tree where the yellow earth had been thrown aside.

No curious eyes were there, no tongues to wag or comment. The official, Scott, Lawrence and Allan placed the coffin upon the improvised hearse, walking beside it silently to the grave.

With Scott had come the good little minister from Forty Fort Church—oh, the distance!—to do honor to faithful services rendered.

Dorothy held Maithèle's hand; once it quivered and a sob broke from her lips that nearly pierced Allan's heart. Lawrence stood directly opposite the two girls, his hand resting upon Allan's shoulder, and every little while Allan's glance singled out Maithèle, with pathetic foreboding—marking the change a few weeks had made in an unusually bright countenance.

The service was short; there was no need of a sermon. The dead man's life was an example. Yet, up in the topmost branch of the great black walnut tree, a feathered stranger insisted upon a song. He sang as he would always sing, as his feathered posterity would sing after him, when the tall white shaft raised in memory would bear evidence of the sharp finger nails of a passing century—the song of peace, untrammelled by the world.

They were leaving the house and Maithèle had the good woman aside.

"But you have more than paid us for the little we did; if it wa'n't for the morgidge, miss, we wouldn't a took a cent."

"Mrs. Scott told me about the mortgage; it is Ben, not I, who removes it."

Maithèle put the thick roll into the woman's hand.

"There is enough, over," she said, "to educate the little girl."

The poor woman was speechless and the anxieties of nights were swiftly forgotten.

"Look now and then," Maithale pressed the woman's hand, 'to that spot,' glancing toward the broken earth beyond the field. "I will come again, and often."

She went down the steps quickly, something breaking in her throat. She did not lift her eyes to the tall individual who, having assisted her to the yellow phaeton, jumped into the buggy beside Lawrence.

Phyllis came running down the path with a rose.

"From over ther'" said the child, and Maithale, bending forward, kissed her.

John Henry touched the grays—away they sped as if life depended upon distancing the buggy that rattled behind.

And when at last the short cut to the river was reached and the grays came to a halt, the buggy stopped also and the two men came forward. Lawrence was spokesman.

"They were going straight on to town," he explained.

"Good-by."

And Maithale gave her hand in turn to each, and to one she said, a mist in her eyes:

"I will never forget your kindness—and—thank you, also, Mr. Lawrence."

Allan answered for both.

"It was happiness to serve you."

"My father will be grateful," smiled Dorothy. "I hardly know what he would have done, had it not been for you two."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE STRIKE DISCUSSED.

CLARA LANSING made a discovery. Calling her fiancé on the long distance telephone, the gentleman's stenographer had innocently imparted information rather convincing to the lady as evidence of guilt. Her feelings were excessively wrought, and in a short while, she harrowed up situations wherein Maithale was the designing woman and she the victim. Believing herself cruelly affronted, she planned a battle-field. She meant to be fair. She would gain her point, and then, with the law on her side, there would be no doubt of the issue; the world's applause would be certain—the world, that seldom stops to think, but rushes on with the standard-bearer. A promise is sacred but not binding as the law. The law must see as well as hear the evidence. Law is the sesqui-opinion; rule, regulation, refinement, are the ingredients. Law is not mere principle—principle is honor; but principle and honor are part of the law. The promise is a moral obligation not binding by law.

Clara Lansing did not understand the broad gentleness that reaches out with a tenderness born of affinity to retain the sacred promise. She snapped at the bargain that advanced self-interest, and resorted to contemptible means to make such promise binding. And Allan? Having opened his eyes to the full illumination of Clara Lansing, could not have been coerced; to save the being

he loved from a scurrilous charge was his one consideration.

Possibly ten days after the passing of Ben, Allan made a journey to the city. If he hoped by so doing, to accomplish something of permanent importance he was destined to be disappointed. Apart from two or three stinging sarcasms in reference to Ben, an unpardonable sally in which Maithale was the butt, the visit came to an end.

The true womanly pride that resents the half-hearted offer, the true womanly spirit that spurns the gift rightfully another's, the true gentleness that waits not the cruel rejection, but with fine antithesis offers the good excuse, qualities that distinguish a true woman, seemed wholly lacking in Clara Lansing.

He had not referred again to the marriage, yet the fatal day was approaching. The ceremony would take place.

Meanwhile over on the island great preparations were going on. Dorothy was bent upon the ball. Twice during one week she made the same comment, "Is is not original, dad?" And Mr. Dale, whom she addressed, responded on both occasions, "Serious, my daughter." But he left the final decision with Scott.

"It's all right," said Scott; "thet ball proceeds." They were seated on the long bench in Hammock Court.

"I hed a talk with the boys; the chief said he wa'n't one to spile innocent amusement for the fun of it, an' I give him a pussonal check to help the boys on. I don't think the chief would care to see town lots give away, but he don't mine now an' then if middling passes 'round the cake. He objects to middling because he's outside the union ranks; but he hes to be politic in order to rope him in."

"And Dorothy may have her ball?"

"I wouldn't spread the invites too thick. You don't want to hev' swells 'round thicker'n blackberries in season when a strike is on; it don't look sociable to the other side."

"And you think it's bad policy to hire non-union men to build the pavilion?"

Scott assented.

"If Dorothy was my girl, she couldn't hev' anything thet might stir the pot already boilin'."

Dale was irritated. Scott's comments clearly demonstrated that he might not do as he pleased in his own establishment.

"It is not so much my daughter's affair. I am making it my own. The men that come here to do the work will be brought from New York—they will be non-union men—I shall hardly consult the strikers about my private affairs."

"I ain't throwing advice away, Dale. Off—course, as your family an' guests air to be considered, you'll take the precaution to——"

"The men I engage for the work will act as a guard. I do not anticipate trouble."

Scott jerked his gray slouch hat over his brow.

"Neither did Dick Allan anticipate trouble when he went to the top of Mount Lookout, to get the view."

"Oh, I'm fairly convinced that gang of cutthroats were—were just lawless fellows. I don't think the union had anything to do with it. A thing like that might happen at any time, in any place."

"Wa'al, I ain't carrying coals to Newcastle."

Scott was moving away, but Dale hung on to the favorite topic; putting his hand upon the other's arm, detaining him, he opened up with didactic emphasis:

"Every man has the right to run his own establishment—to engage his servants from the four corners of the globe, if so disposed."

"Off—course, off—course."

But Dale would not be turned aside.

"To make individual contracts and to shut or open his door according to his own inclination."

"Go on, Dale. You 'bout wound up, an' I'm attention."

Dale did not proceed at once and Scott questioned subsidiarily:

"You wa'n't in favor of the ball at first?"

"When my daughter suggested a ball on the island I was not in favor of it; it did not seem serious, but as I thought the matter over, I concluded that it might be a good thing after all. The ball proceeds and possibly the union men will arrive at a wise conclusion; anyway they get a lesson."

"It ain't pleasant to hev' to git your learning after ye hev' growed up."

Scott's big hands went deep into the pockets of his sack coat; he looked uneasily at his friend from the corners of his half-closed eyes, and sighed. He had many examples of Dale's perverseness. Yet he always ended by admiring the brave, assertive spirit; on the present occasion, however, he experienced the keenest alarm. A fine mist was in the air, and Scott's eyes sought the leaden sky.

"Don't go, Scott."

Putting his hand forward, Dale felt the dampness. The two walked over to Bachelor Quarters. The cosy place had a deserted air, and lighting a cigar Dale eagerly resumed:

"Freedom should be respected, whether it be personal, political, or religious; the Constitution of the United

States is violated, the Declaration of Independence becomes an obsolete document, if dominated by a single force."

"Ther' you go kiting. I dunno but I'm objecting to freedom as I see it in these parts."

"You mean license? License, Scott, is not freedom; it is a violation against law, and labor unions that lay down restrictions are a menace, and menace that throws a country into disorder is revolutionary. The laborer, as you say, Scott, is entitled to his hire, but he is not, for the same reason, entitled to deprive a fellow laborer, not belonging to the union, of his hire."

Dale waxed eloquent as he continued.

"Who are the great sufferers when a strike is organized? Not the capitalist—he, at least, continues to live; not the union people—they merely cripple themselves. It is the class you call 'middling.' Scott, I propose to run my establishment to suit myself."

"Got Bible teaching to jestify you."

Scott drew at the weed, sending two whiffs to the rude board ceiling.

"The parable of the laborer in the vineyard."

Mr. Dale knocked the ashes from his cigar, but made no comment and Scott proceeded:

"The fellers kicked 'bout wages; not because they didn't git what they bargained for—they did; but they called the master to task for doin' the same kindness to the other fellers that hedn't worked as long as they hed."

"Bible lessons are scoffed at. I'm afraid if the Lord were to appear again—here among the miners, for example—and say to the men that a mine is an owner's establishment, that he has perfect right to engage his servants as he pleases and from whence he pleases, and pay each according to his worth, or, as the lesson goes, ac-

according to his will, I believe, Scott, these same miners would repudiate the Lord."

Scott's influence over Dale palpably expressed itself in the facetious rejoinder:

"Don't go heving pipe dreams."

Getting upon his feet, Scott walked over to the door.

"And the days of strikes will be over, Dale—thet's your idee?"

"The strike may never be over. The strike is the individual's privilege; it is a part of his freedom. It is not his privilege, it is Puritanic domination to dictate to his employer, or to interfere with the man hired to take his place."

"Thet's sense, genuine pioneer sense; no pipe dream in thet."

Dale looked doubtfully at Scott, then at his own cigar.

"As you know, Scott, the first trouble originated in one of my own mines. A small fire broke out; it could have been extinguished in a few moments; a man was told to run for a bucket of water; he refused; he was not paid, he said, to haul water. Of course he was promptly discharged."

"Off—course. What he expected was thet the feller that give the order should hev' tetched his hat to him, doubled his wages an' give him an envite to tea. I dunno but what I would hev' don' it if I had bin the feller."

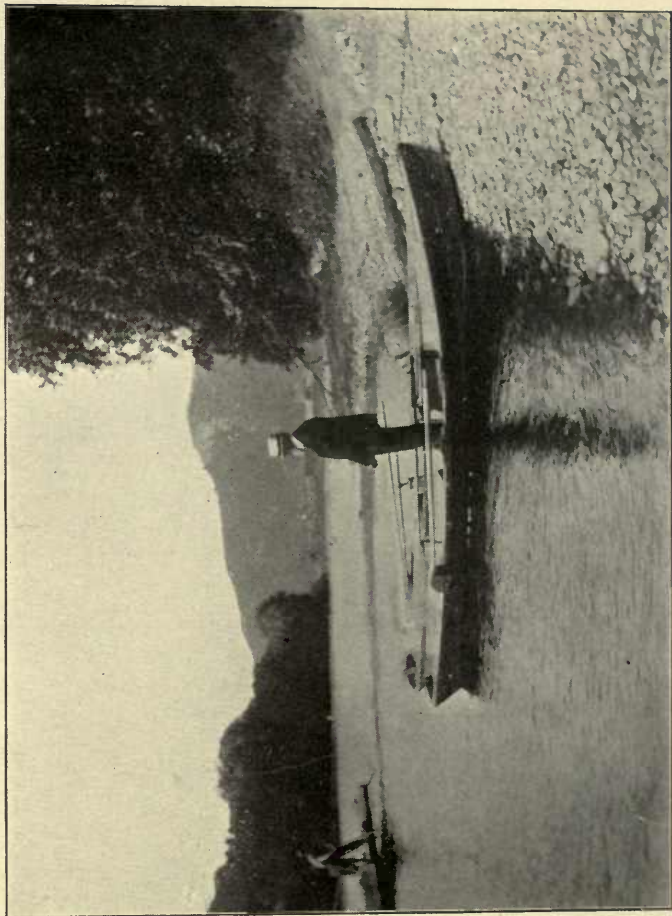
He drew again at the weed as he continued:

"If a man hes idees as I tole you years back, an' great ambition to shine, ther' ain't but one way to get shed of both. Get a pack of dogs. Dogs can't talk back so'st he'll be worried or troubled weth their opinions, but they can use up his energy so stirringly thet it ain't fit for any other game."

Dale laughed, passing the interruption.

“Well, you know the result at the mine; we refused to reinstate the man. The story hardly went the rounds.”

The two walked down the path to the river, conversation flagging between them. And as the ferry disappeared with Scott, Mr. Dale, standing erect in the skiff, lifted his eyes. The peace of evening was slowly creeping upon Dial Rock.



MR. DALE WATCHING THE FERRY-BOAT—DIAL ROCK IN THE
DISTANCE.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MARRIAGE TAKES PLACE.

THE fields are stubbled and thin, the rivers cool and clear, and the hills craggy and steep are tinted with olive, gorgeous red, yellow and brown. Hardly a twig, leaf or humble flower or creeping vine, but feels the magic touch. The wonder brush of Nature's artist is exhausting the color-box, and the picture nearly finished elicits the cry of human admiration.

Later Boreas, driving down the valley will see the picture, and with the usual vandalism tear it from its setting; but for the present it hangs—brown earth, deep blue sky and gorgeous foliage.

Allan, gazing from the window of a flying train, filled with the perceptive cognizance of the dilettante, resented the bold infringement; he would have the delicate landscape undisturbed.

"Three or four weeks," he sighed, "and not a leaf will remain of a summer beautiful beyond recall."

It was over—the little part he had played in the drama which is the marvel of life; and it is well, perhaps, that the rose-gate of Paradise is lost in mist when the occasion demands the wait without.

Clara Lansing had been very nice with the wedding ar-

rangements. Things had been accomplished beyond his expectations.

Shortly after reaching the city, he repaired to the Lansing residence, and, being received alone, he thanked her warmly for the small favor.

They were in the library; in fact, each occupied the identical chair as in the last visit, facing each other. Allan laid the simple plan of the coming day before his fiancée and in part, she agreed to it—agreed, at least, that after the ceremony they should leave for Rochester.

"I have business there," he said; "it will be more agreeable for you than remaining here."

"How long will business hold you?"

"One week—two, perhaps."

"And then?"

"The choice remains with you—Florida, Cuba, or, I have thought of Italy; neither you nor I have been there in the proper season."

"I do not care for warm climates in any season." She smiled as he suggested France. "I want to tell you—of course, it is a secret—but about the second week of October, uncle goes abroad."

"Oh, that alters our plan. It would not be agreeable to—to find ourselves going over in the same ship with Mr. Lansing."

"That is so; he might be embarrassed with our love-making."

Allan enjoyed the innoxious sarcasm.

"Uncle needs a rest," she said, after a short silence, "and—and we are to have this residence; I mean, it is to be—our home."

"Mr. Lansing is kind; I am glad, too, for your sake. I will be in the city off and on, and for appearance, I will put up here."

Clara Lansing winced.

He was staring at the dado above the low bookcase, and wondering if the brilliant tinting was Clara's taste.

"I will always make things pleasant; rather, as Mrs. Allan, you will not be subject to comment. You understand my position—I will respect yours."

She was silent, though a terrible anger stirred within. She could have annihilated, plunged the small dagger her fingers toyed into his heart; but affairs of this nature have shocking recompense. She was weary of words; besides, the hour of revenge had not arrived.

Silence growing oppressive, Allan ventured with slight hesitation:

"I was a trifle worried about the—the form; we differ, you know, about marriage. But I have talked it over with your minister."

"Talked what over?" And the dangerous toy designed as a paper-cutter fell to the floor.

"The form to be used." Allan grew reckless, noting her trepidation. "You told me you considered marriage a silly ceremony. In a certain sense, I agree with you; so much depends on the way in which one prepares for the solemnity. In our case, the word 'obey' and 'promise to love' will be eliminated from the prescribed form."

"And you arranged this with our minister?"

"He arranged it with me."

"You told him—that I——"

"Credit me, where my name is concerned. The reverend gentleman was informed that Mrs. Allan should not feel herself obliged to obey, and that distinctly for Mrs. Allan the compulsory phrase 'promise to love' would be in poor taste."

"Bah! What are words?"

"They are all or nothing, as we use them."

He lifted the dagger from the floor, and placed it upon the table, regarding the girl silently. Then finding his timepiece, he snapped the lid with a slight, "Pardon me!" It was too late for controversy.

The following day, about noon, Allan and Lawrence entered the splendid mansion.

Allan was punctual to the minute and the minister was not tardy. But the minister waited; Mr. Lansing waited; and the few guests assembled studied the decorations without comment. Almost hanging to the Grecian goddess, holding the silver lamp at the foot of the stair, Lawrence waited the signal from the landing above.

They waited—he waited—almost an hour.

Speculation is the flocculent state of the brain. A spark, and the whole is aflame; a hint, every fibre is a phantom, and every phantom a flame. Thought whirls to the highest pinnacle, or drops to the lowest abyss. A feather floats into the open, and immediately swells into plumes. A simple rose springs from the sod, and a garden appears; the rose is a garden—the garden Paradise!

But speculation spends itself more readily than its power creates.

Lawrence experienced the phenomenon in the trying hour, conjuring up situations that suddenly melted, like a drop of kerosene in the blaze. If—if—oh, the wonderful phantasmagoria! Clara Lansing eloped with an understudy; the uncle, irate and distracted, condoling with the groom, who simply smiles at the delightful vicissitude of fate.

But the wonderful denouement was the full-throated whisper that came without warning from the landing above:

"The bride!"

Lawrence fell suddenly limp, as he turned to give the signal to the page, who at once conveyed the message to the library.

The page accompanied Clara Lansing to the first landing of the broad stairway, and, as he advanced again the wedding march from Lohengrin rang out, and the bride, charmingly gowned for a journey, entered the drawing-room on the arm of her uncle.

The marriage ritual, at no time lengthy, is shortened by request. And the reverend gentleman improved upon brevity by delivering himself of a little oration before the responses, to which the guests might have found themselves obliged to harken, had not a soft pianissimo accompanying a violin solo proved a coup de grâce.

Naturally, roses were in order, but their profusion was rather too lavish for the occasion. The Bride rose was conspicuous for its absence, but the American Beauty was in evidence; they stood bold and beautiful against the wall, upon the mantel and on an exquisitely carved pedestal near the bride and groom.

Directly facing the groom, in a far-away corner, was the piano and beside it, the slender figure of the girl violinist.

Her face was hidden by the tall clump of palms, but the white of her gown was visible through the green.

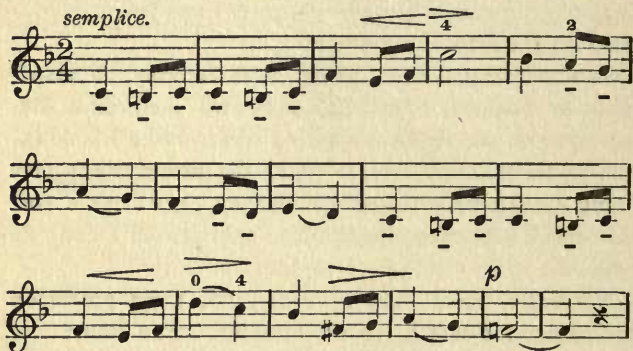
As the oration ended, before the first response was made, Rubinstein's Melody in F floated through the room.

Allan trembled, strong man though he was, and the words his heart created for the Melody the first night he heard it, dropped like beads from a rosary whose chain held a cross:

OUR RIGHT TO LOVE

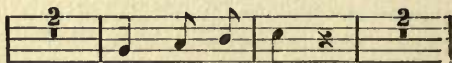
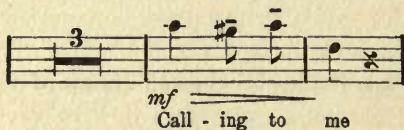
Deep in my heart is a cry that awakes,
 Filling my soul with joy till it breaks;
 Oh, the sweet words, like roses that blow
 From gardens of dream—that were long, long ago.

He forgot the woman at his side—forgot the people
 and the minister, waiting for his response. And the



minister's face went suddenly pale. The bride grew florid.

"Repeat, if you please," said the reverend gentleman
 for the second time; but the violin cried:



Voice sweet and low

"Calling to me in accents low—
 Never to part—to part again."

The bride was forgotten. The voice was calling—the voice he would ever hear, ever keep with him unto the last day. The music floated on and with it the beautiful memory, and his soul answered with the melody:

Loved one I hear, but shackled and bound,
Your voice is the life—ineffable sound
That cheers me and comforts, and bids me arise;
My spirit will dwell in the light of your eyes.

The suspense lifted at last. The music ceased and his thoughts came back to the world. His eyes held the minister, whose fine face bore lines of deep anxiety, as, for the third time, he spoke:

“Kindly repeat after me——”

And to his intense relief Allan mumbled through the form that short, though it was, seemed all the way to eternity.

Clara's revenge fell heavy.

She had discovered the girl violinist at a concert some days before and engaged her for the ceremony.

If she hoped that Allan might fancy the girl to be the being he loved, she was mistaken. The living presence would hardly have shaken his belief. He was simply carried beyond himself with memories—broken, dead, and, as he believed, never to be realized.

The influence had not lifted as Lansing offered his warm congratulations. And then, for the first time, he met the bride's mother and sisters.

The breakfast followed.

Lawrence, the only friend of Allan present, meant to do the proper thing, but, lifting the sparkling glass, it slipped from his fingers, broke, and the toast was lost.

The piano and violin continued heart-piercing adagios. The bride had arranged the programme.

And at last! At last! They were off, Lawrence accompanying the bride and groom to the train. In the nice compartment, Mrs. Allan found flowers, bon-bons, books; but the gentleman who arranged her chair and folded her coat had not touched her hand.



“A PINK FLOWER IN HIS MOUTH AND A STALK OF THE
BLOOMS AT HIS FEET.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR REVENGE.

TASSO was there, ready for his one feature act—a pink flower in his mouth, and a stalk of blooms at his feet.

“Wa’al, I’ll swan!”

Scott was gazing fondly upon his pet.

“I told him to git two flowers for the puttiest girls in the land, so he goes off an’ gits a whole stock of ’m. He won’t play favorites, no sire, not him—too politic.”

Scott waved his hand to Dorothy and Maithale, who came out on the veranda as the two men were discussing the merits of Tasso.

“The fust one of you thet gits married, gits Tasso—dead sure.”

He patted the dog on the head, turning to the veranda:

“Louisa wants to know if she be required to wear fancy dress to your ball.”

Dorothy’s deportment was at once grave.

“Aunt Helen has decided upon the costume of a Colonial Dame, but she will not mask. Tell Mrs. Scott not to bother with fancy costume.”

Maithale twined her arm lovingly about Dorothy, and Scott, with tender eyes upon the two, marked the sweet pensiveness of one. He felt that for Maithale the ball would have no enjoyment. The taking away of a faithful servant should not alter plans nicely begun before the

misfortune, but Scott wished for Maithale's sake that Dorothy had given up the ball. Two blows within the month was rather severe; he knew that both had gone hard with her.

"I'll tell Louisa," he said, lifting his hat. "I know she wouldn't wore a mask. I hev' an engagement for the early part of the evening, but I guess I'll be round time to see Louisa home."

Dorothy smiled, giving Maithale a pinch; and when Scott disappeared she clapped her hands with delight.

"He will be among the maskers. Watch for him, Maithale. Won't it be fun?"

Scott was beside himself with schoolboy happiness, and the troubled thoughts pending upon the strike situation were instantly dispelled from his brain.

A costume ball was the acme of his conception of social frivolity—the nugation of the wealthy. He ran over to Allan's town one fine day, and consulted the good taste of that gentleman.

Scott's broad shoulders and bearing suggested the military man, and when the full regimentals came home Scott went into them, and immediately presented himself to his spouse, who sat placidly knitting a woollen sock in the front room upstairs.

She was speechless at first; and then volubility broke upon the unsuspecting yet somewhat conscious Colonel.

"If you don't take me back to war times; but," reflectively; "in the name of common sense an'reason——"

"Wa'al, what's the trouble?"

"Si Scott! Did you ever see a sol-ger with a mask?"

Scott looked terribly stricken, but he answered with some show of spirit:

"No, Louisa, I can't say thet I ever did 'less'n it was a mask of mud."

Her tongue spun on with the velocity of a top.

"I'm naturally disappointed—a sol-ger? Now, who ever heard of a sol-ger squimmidging into a house where he's naturally envited, showing a false face!"

"Off-course, Louisa, in war times he——"

"I ain't hearing 'bout war times now; they be passed an' gone and, fer as I'm concerned, forgotten. It's the present I'm looking to. Declare, I'm dumb! I thought ye was going to hev' a jacket weth lace 'n the sleeves an' one of them long capes like I see in pictures, weth silver fringe on it; velvet breeches, an' shiny boots. Oh, I hed an' idee of style, an' here you walk in like a common sol-ger. I ain't blamin' you, Si; I think your handsome anyway your put, but I can't get over Dick Allan. I wonder what he was thinking about?"

She sighed, looked kindly at Scott, and began again, with a retrospective note:

"I don't suppose he can be blamed exactly; dunno but what I'd don' wurst if I'd bin in his place; it's a terrible setuation to be married to the wrong girl! It's a wonder to me he didn't advise you to go off an' be a bride."

"Oh, Dick Allan wa'n't married when we talked together about thes rig."

"I know he wa'n't; but he was on the eve of it, which is about the same." She broke off abruptly. "Seen him sence?"

"Yestidy."

"I hope he ain't livin' fair an' square weth her after all she done?"

"Lord a-mighty, Louisa, the questions! Do you suppose I'm goin' to cut friendship by astin' pussonals?"

Possibly the rebuke went home; her voice modulated as she ventured:

"He didn't say anything?"

"He hed a lot to say."

Scott walked over to the door, listened, closed it with quiet satisfaction, returning again to the chair beside Mrs. Scott.

"He left the bride in Rochester day before yestidy," said Scott, taking the just-begun sock out of Louisa's hand very nicely, and throwing it across the room.

"I hate to see you workin' all the time. Go into town; buy forty dozen pairs——"

"I declare, Si Scott! I was jest at the turn."

"Wa'al, turn thes way an' listen to me." And he gave the plump chin a loving pinch.

"I'm looking fer trouble, Louisa; leastwise Dick Allan is. He's got wind of suthen thet might take place, an' thin again it mightn't."

Mrs. Scott was all attention, and Scott imparted the information he had obtained from Allan.

"I'm glad," said Mrs. Scott, when the husband subsided; "mighty glad thet you'll be a sol-ger. An' where will Dick Allan be if the encounter takes place?"

"Not on the fence, Louisa. Wa'al," getting upon his feet, "before I git thes rig off I'll show myself to the dogs."

He strutted forth, and Mrs. Scott, recovering the knitting, picked up her stitches exactly at the turn, making several elucidations which no one heard. Mr. Dale got one for perverseness, and Dorothy one for being "set upon the ball;" but it was the knitting, after all, that received the full share of abuse. She wound and unwound the yarn, put in stitches, and pulled out stitches, and finally gave up the pleasing task. "Si's a sensible man," she said aloud; "enstead of working thes way, I might be making lemon pies."

The sock went into a corner, where it remained for many days.

Allan had gotten wind of something that, coming from a direct source, filled him with grave apprehension. He did not make explanations to Mrs. Allan. In fact, Mrs. Allan's maid informed him when he announced himself in the little reception-room which divided their residences, that her mistress was resting. He wrote a letter of some length, leaving it where Mrs. Allan might find it.

Then Allan came again to Pittston. It was not his intention to impart his information to Mr. Dale; too late to recall invitations; besides he hoped to avert the proposed uprising of the union men, whose grievance seemed to be the employing on the island for the festive occasion of non-union men. He had succeeded so well in his efforts that he found leisure to run over to his own town. He found a note from Mrs. Allan upon his desk, which required an answer. The lady desired to be positively and immediately informed if he would be in Rochester on the following day. She gave the excuse that she had arranged for a theatre party. Always courteous, he sent a telegram to the effect that it would be impossible, as business detained him where he was. Mrs. Allan's fury spent itself ere the telegram was crumbled and tossed to the floor. She was not taken unaware; she was prepared. Since the first hour of their arrival in Rochester, she felt that her husband's game was to keep here there, amused, until after the ball. She also convinced herself that he would find an excuse for leaving her to attend the ball. The disguise would afford him an opportunity to converse with Maithéle. So overpowering became the hallucination that, when she received his letter, which explained only that he re-

gretted to be called away, she prepared at once for a little journey, hoping that the surprise to the gentleman might be the desired opportunity for revenge. Shadows of coming events floated through her dreams and stalked with every footstep of the way.

At the same hour that the husband boarded a train leaving his own town for Pittston, the wife boarded a train at the station in Rochester for Wilkes-Barre. Mrs Allan was clever; she would not take the chance of running into the gentleman whose name she bore. The run over to Pittston was only a few moments, and she would not venture over until dusk. She experienced a keen satisfaction in the thought of revenge, as Allan experienced a delightful exhilaration in the thought of averting serious disaster to friends inestimably dear.

He had accomplished much, and little remained but to guard against the blow. As his mind carefully reviewed the situation, boarding an outgoing train, a hand fell heavily upon his shoulder, and, glancing up, he recognized the kind official. It was partly through the official that he had acquired the knowledge appertaining to the hostility of the miners. Together they discussed possibilities and the attack which they hoped to frustrate.

About midday the last touches were given the music-room, and Dorothy spoke her approval as Jack Ruford, who, gaining courage since the event of a certain nuptial, went the length of the room with Maithale, doing the pretty figure of the scarf dance to the delight of the small audience. And the younger Miss Rice and Will Thomas, also inspirited by the desire for applause, fell in line.

"If we do only half so well to-night," said Miss Rice,

fanning herself with a palm leaf, "our fame will go abroad."

"Which means that Frohman will engage us for next season," chimed in Will Thomas, ever delightful and droll.

He strolled off with Miss Rice, and the others followed. The younger Miss Rice was merely frivolous. Her kind is the brown bee of society—always busy, always buzzing; unlike, however, the pretty insect whose mission is to gather sweets, society's bee is bent on prying missions for gathering gossip.

Before six P. M. the hostelry, which was merely a temporary annex to Bachelor Quarters, had the appearance of a wayside inn in a thriving town in early days, the innovation being the dress-suit case, which replaced the clumsy wooden box of long, long ago.

The guests were arriving from five of the clock.

Maids, valets, waiters, running in every direction, and lights were appearing in all the windows. Lamps and Chinese lanterns everywhere; they swung in trees, adorned balconies, and formed brilliant strings of illumination reaching from post to pillar. Even the ferry-boat took on a gala appearance, as it moved back and forth. The whole scene was one of fairy splendor and brilliancy before the twilight shadows fell.

From the entrance of the house proper to Bachelor Quarters, a canopy stretched, and just beyond the Quarters, where the path sloped, two guards were stationed.

At the end of the path, on a small platform covered with a Turkish rug, stood the formidable person who requested a card.

Mr. Dale had taken every precaution for the safety, as well as for the entertainment of his guests.

A mounted guard patrolled the island, and as many

again in blue regimentals were severely on duty. Yet strange rumors were afloat. Silas Scott heard the murmur, as, nicely ensconced behind old Sorrel, he sped to the ball. "It's a-stonishing," he mentally commented, "the folks that like to crowd round ent'tainments to which they ain't envited."

The occasion was one of stirring interest to the Scotts. Mrs. Scott could not be persuaded to accompany her husband. As she explained debut possibilities, while arranging Scott's finery on the bed:

"I never was a dabu', Si, an' it's too late to begin. Off-course, it's different weth you; you air a man, an' folks, specially society folks, don't expect much from a man." Saying which she jerked a tulip from Scott's fingers and threw it out of the window. "Land sakes, you ain't goin' to wear thet thing! I jest hate the smell of tulips; they alwus make me think I'm at funerals when I ain't."

Nevertheless, Scott was happy, and so overwhelming is the genius for self that, arriving at the ball, he had almost forgotten the loss of the tulip boutonniere.

Mrs. Scott insisted that her husband should do the thing "prop'ly"—give the family an "air;" and so Old Sorrel went flirty, finding himself handled by a real coachman. The carriage was new, also the coachman, and Scott experienced no end of uneasiness as both joggled at every turn of the road. But he held his temper, as becomes a gentleman on the high road to civilities, resting the blame, through force of habit, upon Sorrel.

"His head's plumb turned weth the sight he got of me an' the emportence of hauling a fashionable rig; I wouldn't be surprised," he went on in a stage whisper,

"if Sorrel wa'n't calculating thes very minute on a docked tail."

Through the thick brush that skirted the edges of the drowsy hills encircling the island, scowling faces, eyes opening from narrow black fringed slits, sent threats that failed to agitate the life pulsating across the stream. The only connection between aggressiveness and joy was the little ferry-boat touching either bank with its meaningless swish, swish.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE COSTUME BALL.

BEFORE the curtain rises and the play begins the pulse quickens with the joy of expectancy, and the tightening or the slacking of strings stimulates the mind to meet the shrill ecstatic call of the clarion, the quavering hush of the violincello, the sonorous tones of the big trombone, or the whisperings of the dulcet violin.

But, the sorcery, the witchery, of tuning-up precedes the dance, when loving twains await with keen delight the trial passes of the rosin-bow, which preludes the leader's tap, sharply announcing the first step of the light fantastic.

Over the river, across the sward, rapture bursts before the brilliant display—gay tents, flowery awnings, swinging lanterns, lights and shadows, sub-silentio fantasies, to picture dreams, reminding one of days romantic from pages of forgotten lore.

Far off, perhaps to many, the invitation to the capricious whirl, but to hands already clasped, awaiting the irresistible bidding, the moment has arrived that bears them away in the easy glide of entrancing melody.

The rough board walls of the pavilion, hung with canvas and garlanded with green, scintillated with electric bulbs, while fringed about the base, tall slender palms completed the bower.

But what are decorations? It is the people, gor-

geously gowned and costumed, that make the real adornment.

The clock had spoken, the little bell tinkled, and the sonorous wakings of human notes mingled with the fervid cries of stringed instruments.

Overhead, the quick passing to and fro stopped short, and the noise of doors opening and closing abruptly ceased. Corridors and stairway filled with a strange people, just stepped out of frames too long hidden in garret holes. Into the reception-room they filed, bowing graciously, offering jeweled finger-tips to stately dames in Colonial attire.

From the reception-room to the music-room only a step, and the throng, crowd—garlanding the walls.

The taut strings of the instruments fairly shriek with suspense. The Toréador giving the signal, the leader's wand tapped upon the stand.

Carmen bowed to the Toréador, smiling upon her vis-à-vis; but all eyes were upon the side couple courtesying to each other—the gentleman, a tall Friar, with the distinguished bearing of a prince, touching the finger-tips of Autumn, whispered:

"No mask could ever disguise, no costume conceal your lovely personality."

Her gown, soft and clinging, is woven with a thread of silver, and upon the deep lace flounce a border of full-blown yellow roses; over the bare shoulders to the hem of the gown a filmy mantle drops, sunset tint, literally strewn with bronze-green leaves. The white silk mask concealed the features, but there was no disguise for the wealth of burnish gold-brown hair, parted upon the brow and falling in a soft coil simply adorned and held in order by two ropes of priceless pearls.

The guests from West Pittston, and those who had

taken possession of the hotel, arrived *en masque*. And of the many carriages that crossed over, one contained a single occupant. She alighted, ignoring the salver.

"John Henry"—the voice had a forcible note in it—"I dropped my card, possibly on the ferry."

John Henry inclines as low as form permits. The familiarity pleased him. Had she offered silver, he might have detained her.

The entrance door stood wide. She passed the reception-room, falling in with the maskers.

Enveloped in black, soft velvet, glittering with tiny silver stars. The bodice of the gown, cut square, displayed to advantage, perhaps, a diamond necklace of unusual splendor, but the sleeves were long, reaching to the wrist. A fillet of silver, from which lifted a single star, encircled the brow, and a short black gauze veil, fastened upon the crown of the head, falling over the shoulders, completed the disguise.

"Is that Night in the doorway?" inquired the Clown of Folly. Folly giggled:

"She must be homely to appear like that!" Folly had beautiful arms, and they were bare.

"Watch me waltz with Night the next round."

He disappeared, likewise the dark figure in the doorway, and Folly smiled upon an Indian, who claimed the dance; and even as Folly danced she giggled, and, for the once, with an excuse. The Clown had consoled himself with a pretty Flower-girl.

Silas Scott observed the peculiar manœuverings of Night from the first moment of her arrival. He saw her avoid the reception-room, which proved either that she lacked nice deportment, or that she had reason for avoiding the usual civilities. When she refused to waltz with the Clown, he mused:

"He wa'n't putty enough," and with an after-thought, "I guess she's in mourning for somebody; leastwise it looks that way."

Presently he saw the lady bend forward eagerly, following a couple whom Scott easily recognized. Watching, he nearly forgot his own correct bearing by shoving his hands deep into the pockets of his trousers.

But his attention was further called to the stranger. Following closely, he saw her station herself behind a clump of palms on the far side of which two persons were seated.

He joined her, apologizing, hoping to engage her in conversation; but she did not deign to notice, and, brushing him aside, mounted the stairway. He dared not follow, but, growing intensely interested, concluded to wait her return.

Night expected, perhaps, to find some evidence of guilt in the room she invaded. But her face wore a look of disappointment as she returned to the ballroom.

Night was mistaken in the tall Friar. Mounted and armed, Allan at the moment was on the road across the river, nicely conversing with two officers of the near town.

The telephone wire connecting with the island had been cut, but the electric display proved the other wire intact. Too many apparently unarmed men were recreating at the rather advanced hour. Yet, consulting his watch, he was gratified that the time for the threatened attack had passed. Yet, through overanxiety mayhap, or a sort of presentiment, the sense of impending disaster seemed at hand.

Nearing the turn in the road, the officers cantered ahead, and Allan, seizing the advantage, found himself at the end of the turn, facing the ferry. This was not

the first, but the second time inside the hour that he had ventured near the fairy scene. Drawing rein, he gave himself up to reverie.

But, could his eyes have penetrated beyond the swinging lights, beyond the ballroom to a remote corner in the pavilion, the wrath of strikers, the fear of attack, would have melted, would have been as nothing in comparison. Fortunately, perhaps, his vision held only that which it filled—soft lights, sweet music, and the witchery of night. With a sigh, he gave the horse his head and galloped off to join the officers, who were advancing toward the turn with a respectable force.

Autumn and the tall Friar, having danced and enjoyed tête-à-têtes sufficient for the evening, grew weary; at least the lady announced her mood with a sigh.

"I am thirsty," said the Friar.

"You always are," laughed she, "but behold my mercy! It reacheth to a door, on the inside of which is the fountain of good cheer."

"Oh, let's to it," replied he, in the same light vein.

And Night, who never for a moment lost sight of the two, followed.

Two couples, through love of sport or sheer ennui, also found the side door on the garden side of the pavilion, and, as the Friar and his lady entered, the Clown was discovered helping Folly to a sandwich, both having removed masks.

"This is not in order, my children," said the Friar.

Folly giggled, but the Friar shook his head severely, and fumbled his beads.

"You are giving bad example; and what is this? Bread and meat, and the prescribed fast not ended before one quarter before eleven of the clock?"

Folly fell upon her knees.

"Oh, shrive me, shrive me, holy man!"

"Get up!"

The Clown's hand fell lightly upon her shoulder.

"Get up," he repeated; "thou backslider; the Philistines are upon us."

But the dreaded foe proved to be only Carmen and the handsome Toréador. The couples of the quadrille knew each other, and, thus merrymaking, the others removed masks.

As the Friar went over to the punch-bowl, the door opened unceremoniously, and Night entered, like an ugly draught, and, immediately after her, a man of splendid physique, though a trifle portly, wearing military uniform.

The intruder scowled beneath the mask. She feared the man, too, having recognized his voice, and she proceeded cautiously.

Dorothy's embarrassment was evident, and she forthwith apologized:

"The mask is rather an excuse for crime; I have taken advantage of it and neglected my guests. Won't you dispense generosity by removing yours; we are dying to discover you?"

Possibly Night did not hear; she was moving over to the Friar, and for some reason inexplicable to himself, or, mayhap, in a mere spirit of fun, he instantly secured the mask, ere Night discovered the coveted glimpse. The party were finding seats; there was some confusion on the raised dais, too. It was an interim, and two of the musicians, having slipped through a side door and around to the front veranda, immediately entertained the promenaders, rendering on light guitar and mandolin a selection from "Carmen."

Dorothy, inspired by the aria, which belonged to a

Don José, snatched a red rose from the table and threw it at the Toréador, and Maithele's warm impetuous southern nature, with bold disregard for conventions, broke forth in song. She was leaning against one of the decorated pillars that supported the pavilion, the autumn mantle falling from her shoulders. Could she have penetrated the mask of Night, the passionate couplet might have died in her throat; but the joy of melody was in her soul. Casting wistful, alluring glances at the Friar, the pathos in her voice was never more entrancing as she sang, softly:

“L'amour est enfant de Bohême
Il n' a jamais, jamais connu, de loi,
Si tu ne m' ai mes pas, je t'aime—
Et, si je t'aime—prends garde a toi!”

Somebody clapped.

“Now come, come, daughter, give us the English version.”

“Hear, hear, it is Mr. Scott! I never would have known. Off with the mask, sir; off with it! Oh, how jolly!”

“I ain't knowing myself, daughter, skylarking after the mourner,” he whispered, bowing his head forward; and, then, in an audible voice:

“If you will kindly git the knot out of thes string, I'll be relieved. The mask has a limit, daughter, an' me an' it hev' tetched.”

The Friar was filling cups and passing them around, Night assisting.

Her movements were easy and graceful, but the thoroughly aroused Scott felt that she meant mischief. He did not for an instant permit his gaze to wander from

her, and only the most acute vigilance could have detected the clever tipping of the vinaigrette. Scott did not see anything drop from the vinaigrette, but the action justified his alarm. Dorothy had just slipped the mask from his face, and he crossed over to Maithеле.

"I don't like mixed drinks, daughter," he said, emphatically.

Maithеле did not understand, but fancying that he had some rather correct idea pertaining to punch as a beverage, she humored his extravagant waste. As the contents went out of the window, Night vanished.

In coming to the ball, Mrs. Allan meant to expose the conduct of her husband and cast an aspersion on the woman he loved; the deadly fluid in the vinaigrette was a last resort; but, frenzied with the Friar's conduct, whom she believed to be her husband, and the song Maithеле boldly sung to him, passion broke all bounds, and in her desperate mood, even crime seemed justifiable. Escaping from the room, she discovered a dark embrasure between the ballroom and pavilion, and crouched into it, awaiting the passing of Scott. And when she was free of him, she broke into passionate invectives:

"The pest; the common thing! I should not have failed but for him. I have not been recognized; I have not been discovered; I could have made my escape!"

She had the chance to escape without detection; but hate, that devouring bacillus, entered her brain.

In the moment of wicked indecision the door of the pavilion opened; the party came forth without masks. Another instant and the identity of the Friar would have been disclosed. But fearing detection, she crouched against the dark wall. Dorothy's entrance into the ballroom unmasked would be the signal. And so this was

the end; for all her trouble, what had she gained? Nothing! But as her brain whirled confusedly she saw the party approaching. Quick! She must decide! Now they were passing. They passed, the Friar and Maithale in the rear. Her hand clutched the weapon, dropped. The opportunity passed.

Trembling with rage, she acknowledged utter defeat. The chance of escape also passed, and the only hope of clearing herself that remained was to remove the mask, find her husband, and surprise the girl. Scott was the stumbling block! But she dismissed the thought; he had no proof that the vinaigrette contained poison. She was leaving the embrasure, when her vision beheld some one in white advancing with hurried steps. Quickly back she slunk, barely in time.

Maithale passed, entering the pavilion.

Maithale was searching the floor, where the party had stood a moment before; evidently something was lost.

The door opened again. Maithale looked up, smiling, yet a trifle surprised.

"I lost my moonstone clasp," she explained to the intruder; "I prize it highly; it was mother's."

Night stood irresolute, and Maithale insisted:

"Won't you please? Everybody is unmasked now."

But the demon's voice was whispering in Mrs. Allan's ear. Going over to the punch-bowl, she filled two cups, tipping the contents from the vinaigrette in one.

"Let us drink to the lucky finder of the moonstone," extending the cup to Maithale, who accepted. But Maithale's ear, wonderfully trained to sound vibration, caught the peculiar resonance of the voice, and immediately placed it. The shock upon her nerves was severe, but instantly she regained her mental equilibrium; yet

so intensely sensitive is the touch of the true artist, Maithele's fingers relaxed—the cup fell to the floor.

The crash of glass arrested the beverage at the other's lips.

Maithele apologized:

"I certainly am clumsy to-night; but I will drink to the lucky finder," at once filling a cup for herself.

But the desperate woman, snatching off the mask, confronted her. Thoroughly prepared, Maithele offered her hand.

"Mrs. Allan—a pleasure we had not anticipated."

"Not?"

"Beg pardon; I mean——"

"That *you* did not."

Maithele hesitated; the angry face disturbed her.

"Mrs. Allan, I am so glad you are here." Coloring slightly, "If it is not too late for congratulations——"

"Oh, they came with your silverware, which I tossed over to my maid."

Struck with the awfulness of the parvenu, Maithele was speechless. Her eyes sought the floor; and she was glad to have the moonstone as an excuse. As she moved about, her eyes searching for the stone, the unclasped mantle fell to the floor, and with it a light thud that brought joy to her ear; the jewel had caught in the leaves that adorned the mantle.

Mrs. Allan was instantly forgotten.

"Oh, I am so glad, so glad to find it." She lifted her eyes, bright as stars; but the other was glowering upon shoulders, beautiful as Parian marble, hair glimmering with bronze-gold lights, and cheeks hinting June roses. The vision of loveliness hardly assuaged the ireful woman; something horrible stirred in her breast and froze the marrow in her bones.

Maithale did not know the real condition. Dorothy held sacred the sad information imparted through Lawrence. Only in speaking of the wedding ceremony to Aunt Helen had she forgotten herself, breaking forth indignantly over the trick of the violin solo; but before Aunt Helen sent the warning glance, Maithale had risen quietly and left the room.

"I will find you a chair," Maithale spoke kindly; "you look weary."

But the lady had no regard for civilities, save on occasion; her words flew like poisonous arrows at a mark.

"Your Friar is attentive?"

Conciliation dropped like a white plume into Malthele's thought, and she answered:

"Yes, indeed, and I like him, too."

"You are very bold about your likes."

"Pardon! Bold is hardly the word; I like him——"

"You dare—to!"

"If you please? I do not understand?" And, after a moment's reflection: "This is my personal affair."

"It is my personal affair," snapped Mrs. Allan.

Maithale was moving away. The other's words were offensive. If she remained, she would, as hostess, be compelled to listen; but her opponent, with rather a dramatic swing of the arm, barred the way, and quickly slipping the bolt of the side door, wheeled about, with menacing gesture:

"You will remain here until I am through with you."

The pavilion had two exits. Besides the garden door, one at the extreme end led to the kitchen; this door was bolted on the inner side, and the only other feasible opening was where the musicians were stationed.

The musicians were playing a dulcet waltz.

Maithale did not speak for several moments; the

other's insolence was too much; she lifted her head, confronting the enraged woman with that singular intelligence that explains the aristocrat. And where was Silas Scott, the good friend!

Lifting her eyes to the window directly opposite, she fancied she saw a hand upon the sill, but instantly it disappeared; and, concluding that conciliation might mitigate the unpleasant feeling, she chose the simple means as the way to peace.

"There has been—there is some misunderstanding," she ventured.

"There never has been any misunderstanding," declared the impossible wife, in a key that instantly shook the other's nerves, like the quick pass of the bow on a shrill treble string of the violin too tightly screwed; and before her thoughts could form a response, the sharp notes of Mrs. Allan's voice flew on:

"Misunderstanding, indeed! I have been the fiancée of Richard Allan for years,—you—you tried to gain his love—you despicable usurper!"

Maithéle could not ape the dramatic. She was simply glorious in womanly dignity.

"If I have done anything to bring about a disturbance in your life, I should be grieved——"

Mrs. Allan tried to interrupt, but Maithéle waved her hand with a gesture, daintily-imperious and silencing.

"If you please! I have no disturbed feelings against you. I wish you happiness."

"Happiness!" sneeringly echoed the aggressive.

"Is it not possible?" inquired Maithéle. "Marriage creates home. Marriage is the rose-gate to real happiness."

And the other, with no gift for poetic semblance, passed the diversion to seize an advantage.

"You love him; you cannot deny it."

"On my honor, and as a gentlewoman, you have nothing to fear from me."

"Fear? I do not fear,—I despise you!"

The vitriolic outburst nearly silenced Maithale; then, calmly, quietly, she decided.

"I would rather be despised than loved by a woman who has so little regard for the decencies."

"Decencies? And this very night I heard you sing amorous words to——"

"Jack Ruford; poor Jack, who knows full well the words could have no meaning for himself."

Mrs. Allan winced. Was she to be overthrown at every turn? Had she failed utterly? Well,—she touched the weapon, and again that cruel, menacing expression.

Maithale saw the action, and shivered,—not with fear. It was the gulp in her throat for Richard Allan.

"You came between!" hissed the other.

And Maithale, disregarding, grew magnanimous.

"Listen to me, Clara."

But the condescension aggravated the other's intensity.

"If you please?"

And Maithale accepted the correction.

"Mrs. Allan, when I first saw Mr. Allan I was only a child, and with the child's heart I loved him, and—he loved me."

"A falsehood! You took him from me."

The steel came back to Maithale's eyes, and remained.

"I am hopelessly at your mercy; wrangling for a man's love is rather beneath my ideas; but I must disillusion you—and, to quote your own unseemly language—'*you took him from me*'" She spoke hurriedly, as if anxious to be through with it all: "I came East; we met

again—often, often; I did not know that he had become entangled with you.”

It was the slip of the tongue; she had not intended so much, but the slip revealed to Mrs. Allan the esteem and regard of the rival; also the rival’s knowledge of the state of the husband’s feelings.

“Entangled?”

How the word stung! Feeling that she had offended, Maithele plunged at the excuse.

“You—you didn’t love him!”

“You evidently mean to be fair. No, I did not. I hated him when we married—I despise him now!”

Maithele nearly moaned aloud, it seemed so terrible. From heart to brain the words flashed—not love him, despise him!

“Well, I have taken your breath, Miss Burton.”

Maithele could no longer conceal the aversion which the language created; she could not remain in the woman’s presence another moment. She would try the exit by the musician’s stand. She moved off; the other barred the way.

“You remain. If Richard Allan is in this house, I shall know in a moment, when the crowd pours in and I shall expose the scandalous behavior of both of you to the assembled guests.”

“You are mad! Have you no regard, no appreciation—courtesy for your host and hostess Mr. Allan is not in this house—at least, if he is, I am not aware of his presence. Say to me what you will to-morrow—any time, but please——”

The other laughed, cruelly.

The waltz was nearing the finale; Maithele shivered with the possibility of a scene.

“If he is not at this ball,” vouchsafed the enemy,

"bear my words in mind ; you have only escaped me once. You shall never benefit by my lack of love or ardent hate. I have the right—I have the claim, and I shall maintain both."

The bewildering despotism almost paralyzed Maithéle's delicate sensibilities, as she answered :

"You have established a claim, which a true woman might be ashamed to acknowledge. There is no just right to an unjust claim."

"You !" cried the other, "you dare !"

"To speak the truth ! The woman who marries a man whom she hates deserves the truth. There is a right, which justifies the claim—where love exists or did exist when the marriage vow was made."

The head poised on the slender neck lifted, bringing the round chin into prominence, and the eyes shining like stars, passed the wife as she continued :

"By that high authority which unites through mutual, kindred feeling and sympathy—free from all contamination and stain, destined from all eternity to endure, I have 'the Right to Love.' "

She paused, a tremor coming over her, yet she extended her hand.

"Clara, here is my hand ; I pledge my honor, you shall never have cause——"

But the other was immovable—stone.

Maithéle did not observe the good friend advancing through the door leading to the kitchen ; she only felt a sensation of weakness as a strong arm encircled her.

"I heard about 'nough to last 'tel jedgment." Scott looked severely upon Mrs. Allan. "The crowd'll be pushing in here in two minutes. Go quickly. Dick

Allan"—he addressed the wife—"ain't here to escort you home, so I'm willing an' astin' the privilege."

Mrs. Allan was silently obdurate, and Scott repeated the invitation, but she retorted:

"I'll trouble you to mind your own affairs."

"Can't do it, daughter. In war or in peace, I'm alwus feet foremost an' generally ahead."

"Insolent! Step aside."

"What's thet? Oh, I ain't perticular about pussonals but——" He put his hand heavily upon her arm and whispered something in her ear; there was no need to whisper; Maithale had left the room.

"It is false—false," she cried; however, she permitted herself to be led off. The waltz was over, and the throng of merry people crowding the pavilion.

Once outside, Scott summoned an attendant, who called her carriage and he got in beside her.

"It ain't polite to envite yourself to see a lady home when she objects—leastwise I don't think it's polite—but I'll see you safely across. I'm fond of Dick an' I don't mind looking after his wife now and then."

And when they were on the other side he was kind and friendly.

"You ain't got to fear me on thes subject, but you took some risk, girl. Love's a great campaign an' if you be on the losing side more'n a dozen times, it's time to quit; leastwise don't fall back on reckless sharpshooting"—glancing at the bit of steel visible in her belt—"it's too dangerous."

She had lost, she knew it; she made a last move, hoping to gain a small favor.

"I'm awfully sorry I came; don't tell Richard. And if you see her, please find her, tell her I begged a favor, if she will keep the affair—my identity—secret."

"Sure, girl, sure; trust her for doing the right thing to you; no matter what you hev' done her. Good-by," he said kindly, and she gave him her hand, and he pressed it warmly. "They ain't anything to fear from me or her, an' I'm sorry for you; if Dick was twins, you'd be all right."

CHAPTER XXVI.

“IT’LL BE YOURS SOME DAY.”

THE hired conveyance, with the big gray horse, tugged up the incline, and Scott fell limp upon the stump of an ancient tree, watching it disappear.

“Wa’al,” he ejaculated, “thet might a-bin a putty nice pufformance if I hedn’t stepped in. Thet’s the way weth a woman; give her a firm holt of what she art never to hev’ hed holt of, an’ she’ll hang on ’tel jedgment. Jest like the bullpup’s sister—alwus sidling up to Teddy R—an’ they would make about the most unhappy couple on thes airth.”

He stopped short, ran his fingers through his hair, damp at the temples from overexcitement, found a large size white handkerchief with his monogram beautifully embroidered in the corner, and proceeded to mop his brow, softly remarking, “I’m enterfering mebbe—weth both.”

He replaced the white affair, passing the subject.

A fascinating scene it was across the river—lights, music, merriment. He had never beheld anything like it. The picture far surpassed his dream of fairyland.

“Wa’al, I’ll swan, if it don’t beat all creation! The head Dale’s got for ent’tainment!”

At Scott’s side hung the splendid sword, and, as his hand touched it his attention was again diverted from lights and beautiful display to himself.

"Guess it's fine to be a sol-ger, if you're born to it, but give me a nice farm——"

Scott's musings were rudely disturbed; he sprang to his feet listening intently. Far off it seemed, yet unmistakable.

There is no sound in all the sounds that have traveled down the ages, since the First Man cried "Whither, whither!" as the gate of Eden closed upon him, so paralyzing to the heart, so terrifying to the senses as the cry of a raging human storm.

Scott dashed up the hill. Exerting his best speed, he fairly flew in pursuit of the hired conveyance. But the big gray horse had crossed the line of mean disturbance and was rearing and plunging in the throes of a tumultuous rout before Scott had gone fifty yards of the road. He accused himself, running all the way: "I shouldn't of let her go by herself; I shouldn't hev' dun it."

They had sprung like hungry wolves from forest deeps, into the open road—men, women, children—with savage faces, menacing gestures and senseless words.

The small band that tried to effect a landing, by crossing to the island in skiffs, had been repulsed by the guards. They tried the ferry, but pointed rifles and an officer of the law kindly persuaded them to go in peace. Again, possibly a half hour before Mrs. Allan and Scott came across, they tried the domino, but the costume ball strictly relegated the domino.

A consultation followed.

These men—not one an American—were fellows who represent thirty cents a day in their own country, but demand four times its equivalent in the Land of Freedom. They were men expert with the knife, which they flourish in the dark, or hurl from behind; they have

no principle, no word not even to their chief. They are the fellows used by the hotheads who bring disgrace upon unions. Having nothing to lose, they push forward, rending with cries that not always kill, but surely disturb the sweet atmosphere of Freedom.

They gathered into a knot one hour after Allan turned his horse town-ward.

It was decided to attack the retreating guests, and Mrs. Allan’s carriage was the first to pass the line.

The speed of the big gray horse was checked and angry faces leered through the carriage window. The driver was held up.

The glittering robe of the lady, the splendid diamond necklace incited the cry against representative wealth.

The carriage was surrounded and shots fired, but the door was not forced; yet, when a line of mounted police, cutting through the mob, slashing and firing right and left, reached the lady, she was in a swoon, and the carriage was filled with the raw escape of discharged lead.

Dashing through the line of officers, Allan reached the carriage, jumped from his horse, giving the bridle to the officer who galloped beside him; but the lieutenant of police stood firm, one hand upon the carriage door, the other uplifted.

“Too late, sir,” he cried, “the lady is dead.”

Allan thrust his head inside the carriage, and the cry he uttered sent the straggling women and children scurrying to their homes.

The question deep in Allan’s soul—Why was Clara there—why had she gone, and why was she returning so early?—vanished, before the more exacting answer—She is here—Clara! Dead!”

But Mrs. Allan was not dead. In her hand, with both balls spent, was a small ivory handled pistol. As he tried

to disengage the fingers from it, she opened her eyes, sighed.

"Oh, Scott," cried Allan, grasping the other's hand, "thank God you are here!"

Scott had just come up, panting with the long run, and unable to speak.

Allan could not explain anything, but the agonized expression of his face revealed the tragedy. His glance far-seeing crossed the river, resting deeply upon the island.

"Notwithstanding"—he paused; Scott following his glance, knew that it indicated Maithale—"I would have given my life to have saved Clara from this."

Fifty yards from the road stood a quaint little house.

Carefully avoiding rocks and ruts, the big gray horse walked the way over to the carriage gate. The drive led through the orchard, around by the nicely arranged flowerbed to the entrance door of the house—a short distance, but the horse stumbled and Mrs. Allan received a jar, although nicely supported by her husband's strong arm. A violent hemorrhage followed.

The people of the house were kind and hospitable.

They lifted the semi-conscious woman to the white bed in the neat little room with its three lace-draped windows.

And Scott, mounted on Allan's horse, dashed back to the island.

Mr. Dale and Aunt Helen were discovered alone, for the great throng were merry in the supper-room, and, as good fortune would have it, the family physician was among the guests.

And very wisely, Mr. Dale concluded to keep the affair quiet, and so nicely was the thing accomplished that guests returning to their homes in town, hours later,

marveled only at the mounted force that patrolled the road.

And when daylight broke with a glow of peace over the dew-bescent valley, the fairy scene, its wonder and enchantment had dropped like a rose over memory's wall, and the golden confession that spread over the land dispensed absolution for the offence of the night.

Mrs. Allan was alive, but the physician, consulting with two eminent men who arrived in the morning with Mr. John R. Lansing, decided that she was beyond medical skill. She seemed wonderfully courageous, demanding to be informed. With little more than a frown, she accepted the inevitable, expressing merely a desire to see her uncle alone.

Mr. Lansing remained an hour at the bedside of his niece, and when he came forth again years seemed to have passed over him. Haughtiness, pride, was fallen, as the sun upon the hilltop of a fair-promise-day oft disappears before the sudden and awful mandate of shadow and gloom.

He walked over to the beautiful big tree by the iron pump; a bench was there and a little child—reminding him of Clara when he first saw her—played with a long-deserted bird's nest. The tree was a vain thing, although vanity in a tree is strikingly admired. It had relatives here and there through the valley, and its whole family is conspicuous for the manner in which they hold to green adornments, when all their kind are on the ragged edge of deep ochre, dull red and dark brown.

Mr. Lansing did not give a thought to the tree, but he felt somehow that the world—the best of it—is vanity. Something had crushed—gone out of his life.

"Do you like birds, mister?"

He did not heed, but he observed the child and wished

rather that she would run away; but the shade of the big tree was the child's playground.

"Say, mister, is they any sparrows in your town?"

Still he was silent.

She fingered the nest, endeavored to gain his attention and with some persistence ventured again:

"I wish sparrows was all dead."

Lansing turned sharply upon her.

"Why?"

"Because they is the greediest things in the world."

"The world?" He addressed the child emphatically, but she did not understand: "There is nothing in the world; it is only the sparrows that amuse one."

His eyes were upon the top branches of the tree, and the child beheld him with knitted brows. She had more to say about sparrows, but Lansing had deeper thoughts that troubled him. Presently the child walked off—re-marking to the nest, saucily, "Guess he never put his cake down wher' sparrows could git it."

Delicacies of every description were conveyed across the river. They were hardly noticed, save by the little sparrow who complained of other sparrows in the great world.

Dorothy came the moment the guests departed, and the Toréador, the picture of distress in citizen's garb, remained over, hoping to be of service. He fairly constituted himself messenger to Dorothy's lightest bidding. He was passing through the hall of the little house, a great bouquet of long-stemmed roses in one hand and a crystal vase in the other, as Lansing accosted him.

"You are very kind to my niece, very kind—every one of you."

"A pleasure to be of some small service, our sym——"

The stern voice cut him short.

"The road—is it in order—to—to the ferry? And, how may I reach it?"

"I will walk the distance if you care to go over the ground."

"Thank you; not at present."

Lawrence gave the simple direction, and the old gentleman turned abruptly, went outside, and began pacing to and fro in the orchard. After a little, as if a sudden resolve possessed him, he stalked off warily, taking the road to the ferry.

To follow the stricken one to the water's edge would be anticipating beyond his own thought.

The storm of discovery comes with a rush, the heart and brain either weakly cower or defiantly meet the first awful force. Only when the storm has spent itself is calm restored, heart and brain reach the normal state, and thought a definite conclusion.

The pedestrian had not arrived at this apex. The storm of discovery was still in his path and the shrieking of its winds brought upon his dulled senses a faint awakening cry, produced by the far-sobbing of a violin. The music disturbed him at first. Was pleasure lurking in the hills, and Clara dying? But as he listened, coming up the narrow path to the house, he recognized the utter absence of gayety in the pleading cry.

Lansing felt intensely bitter. It required all his self-control to meet this girl and to speak to her quietly, as he had been bidden to do, and yet, when she came to him as he waited in the reception-room, both hands extended and eyes overflowing, he recognized a sorrow as deep as his own.

An hour later Mr. Lansing was again at the gate of the house near the road, and she beside him, enveloped in a long, gray coat.

Roses seemed never to have bloomed in her cheeks, and dark rings under the eyes brought pathetically into prominence the great charm of her singular beauty. As she mounted the steps of the house, Lansing lifted his hat and disappeared.

Dorothy came forward. Maithale was completely unstrung and vacillating slightly.

"Who dared!" cried Dorothy.

"Sh—!" Maithale's finger touched her lips. "She asked for me."

Straight they went to the room with the three windows, lace-draped and sweet with Brideroses adorning the mantel. Mrs. Allan reclined in the center of the bed, her head propped high, and eyes fixed upon the intruders.

Maithale went softly down upon her knees.

"Oh, I am so miserable about it all!"

Mrs. Allan lifted a white hand from the counterpane and rested it upon the other's arm.

"Look at me!" Maithale lifted her face obediently, and it seemed to her that the dying one was marking every lineament, as if she meant to carry her countenance into the Great Beyond.

"Remove the coat," ordered Mrs. Allan.

But the coat could not be removed by an imperious order; the clasp had tangled with a slender cord, and Dorothy came to the rescue.

As it dropped to the floor, Maithale apologized, removing the white duck cap. "I did not take time to——"

"You will do," said the dying one.

The white serge was simplicity itself; the apology was for the cut of the gown, which, being a trifle low, displayed the throat and to Maithale seemed frivolous, hardly in keeping with the solemn occasion. She had not considered her attire. Mr. Lansing begged her to

please not delay, and she snatched the coat and cap from the rack and hurried off with him.

"Mr. Allan is outside," answered Dorothy, to the wife's question.

"Send him to us."

"Oh, please—please," softly pleaded Maithale upon her knees, but Dorothy passed out.

"I cannot bear it," Maithale went on, and as Dorothy left the room, she continued: "I am so sorry for this; I never did you a single unkind act!"

"I meant you—harm," spoke the wife. "I should—have killed you last—night—I was a fool!"

"Oh, do not say it; I will not let you; you thought you had cause——"

The door opened. Allan came into the room.

Maithale did not look up, and he went straight to Mrs. Allan.

"You sent for me?"

The voice was kind and low.

She did not speak at once; she seemed to have exhausted her strength; the eyes closed, then opened sharply upon the kneeling figure, finally addressing Allan:

"Yes, I sent for you—I—never knew you to do my—my—bidding so promptly."

Silence followed—a long silence. Mrs. Allan's eyes traveled about the room, noting its every detail. She seemed satisfied that they were alone.

The sun was passing Dial Rock. But shadows were in the room, and the silence grew strangely ominous.

The wife did not speak for several moments, and with eyes closed she seemed to have fallen into a doze. Allan walked over to the window; leaned against it, and as he

did so he caught the sound of a team on the dirt road, the crack of a whip and the snatch of a song.

Ah, the contumely of life!

The wife's eyes were wide. The noise of the world was nothing to her now.

"I have been thinking—thinking of everything——"

"Yes, Clara," said Allan, coming over to the bed, "but what you need now is rest."

The lower lip drooped with the downward curve which always announced sarcasm, but she only repeated—"Rest!"

He came nearer as she spoke again:

"You never, never loved me."

"Clara"—he spoke in a whisper—"I am to blame for much; I ask your forgiveness."

She reached out her hand.

"We would never—never have been happy."

He dared not trust his voice, and she continued:

"I hate everybody; I hate my parents—why did they—let me go—I hate my uncle—I told him——"

"Oh, no! Do not accuse yourself so bitterly," cried Maithéle softly.

The lips of the dying one were ashen and the face slightly inclined to Maithéle.

"I am not sure"—the fingers clutched—"I could hate you again."

Maithéle shivered. She could not speak, but she stroked the hand.

After moments of silence she continued:

"Last night"—the voice came in whispers—"you said it—it is true—you—have—the Right to Love."

And like that twilight that invites the last repose, a mist came over her eyes, and her head swayed from side to side. Presently she jerked convulsively.

"Light the lamp, quick; I hate darkness."

Then some one tapped; Allan went forward, opened the door, and a long shaft of yellow glory shot into the room, and in the very center of it stood Mrs. Scott.

Her eyes went tenderly up to Allan, then fell upon Maithéle. He understood.

Very gently he assisted the kneeling girl to her feet, lifted the gray coat from the floor, and arranged it tenderly about her shoulders.

And Mrs. Scott led her from the room; but ere the door closed Maithéle turned her eyes tenderly to the bed.

"Good-by," she whispered. The dying one did not respond and Maithéle returned to the bedside; lifting the hand upon the counterpane she kissed it. "Good-by, Clara."

The new carriage was waiting outside, with the new coachman on the box.

"We won't miss you for a day or two," said Dorothy. And Lawrence, coming up, took the hands of Mrs. Scott, turning with warmth to the other:

"Dear little sister."

But Maithéle could not find a word.

And as Old Sorrel took his nicest gait, Mrs. Scott remarked, placidly:

"I'm sorry, sorry for everyboddie, but me an' Si feels some to blame in thes affair."

Maithéle turned her eyes from the sunset glory flooding hill and vale. Mrs. Scott was saying strange things.

"We were to blame," she repeated. "We were old an' art to hev' hed more jedgment. You art to hev' bin took abroad before the trouble started an' he art a-bin kidnapped. There's nothing going to happen next time; we hev' hed our exp'rience."

They were passing the duck-pond and Maithéle gazed

with unseeing eyes. And when the miner's settlement was far behind she looked back, but the beautiful Lechaw-Hanna was lost—lost in repose beyond the lowering magnificence of Dial Rock.

“Si hes got his eye on thet island. It'll be yours some day.”

But Maithale did not hear. She was watching a great violet veil that hung immediately over the Michaelite loveliness of the valley.

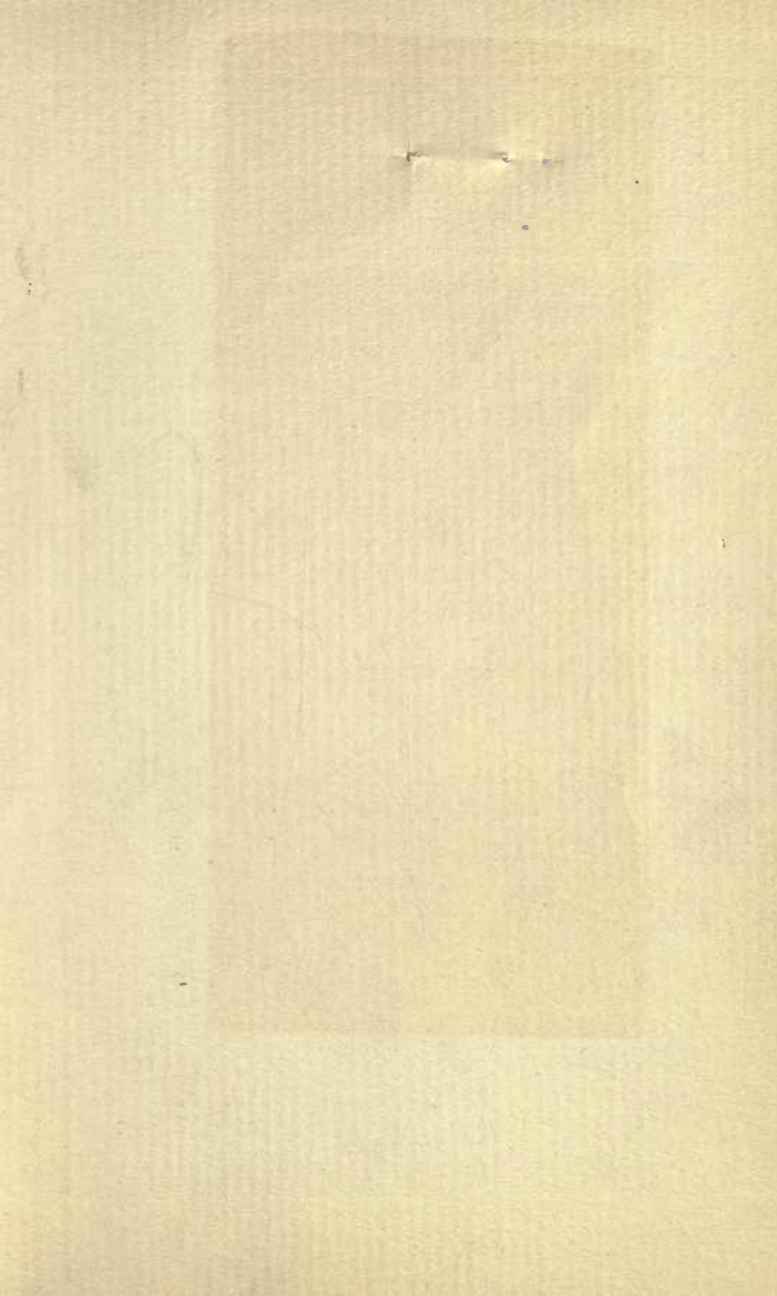
Just as old Sorrel turned into the road that led to the little low gate, Mrs. Scott's delightful volubility again broke forth:

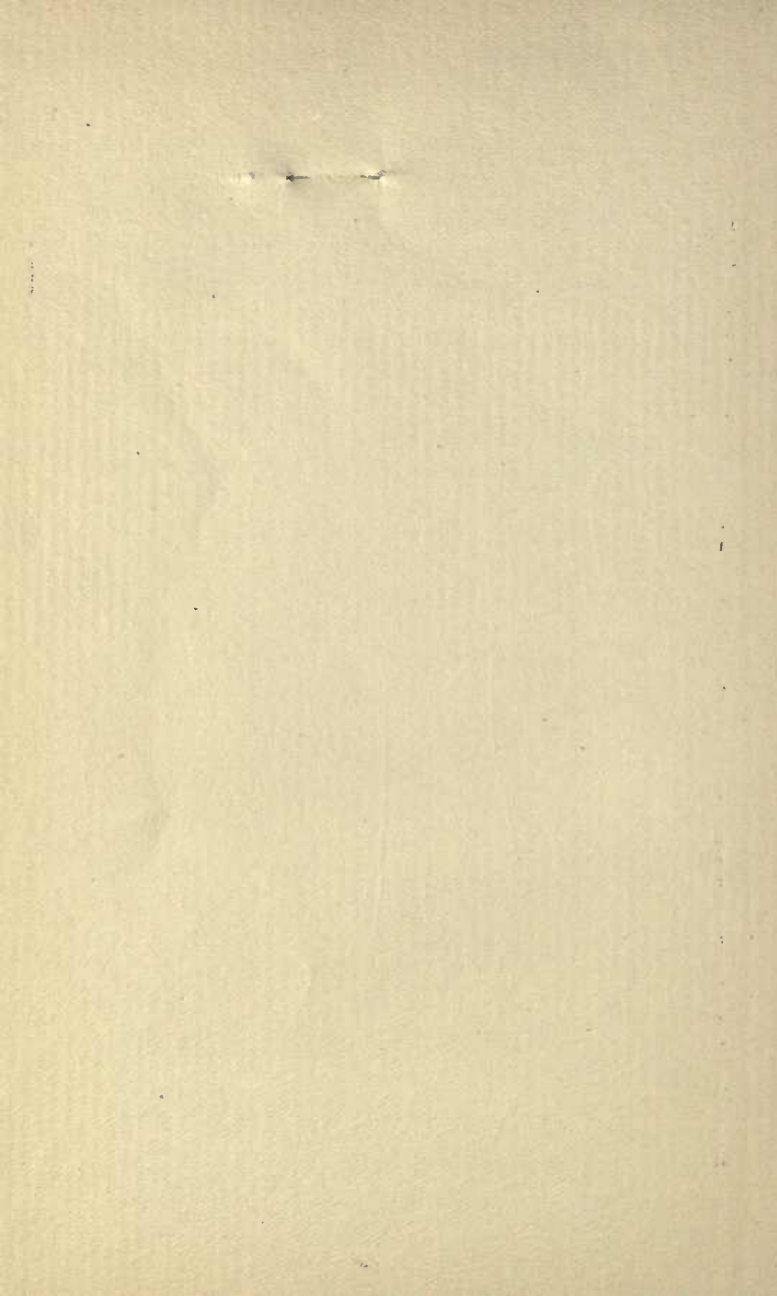
“For ent'tainment and diversion, give me dogs. It's about all they air good for. An' mark me, if Si Scott ain't got all the hull bunch out at the front gate waiting to receive us, I'll give up.”

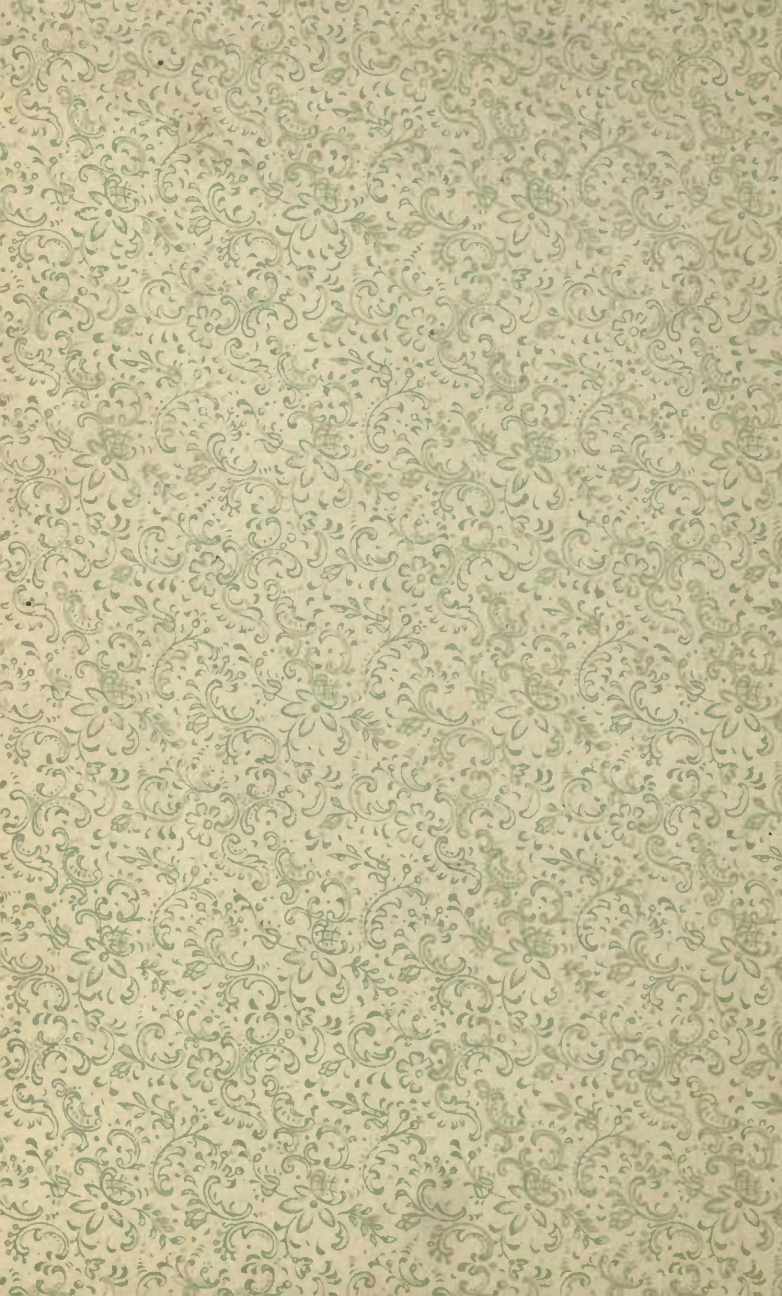
Scott was waiting—the dogs were not far.

And Maithale smiled through her tears.

THE END.







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